University of Alberta

Community as Relationship:
A Narrative Inquiry into the School Experiences of Two Children

by

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Dedicated with love

to Mom and Dad
~ my angels in heaven ~

and

Liam, Joanna, Jane, and Paul
~ my angels on earth ~

~ … to the moon… ~

Abstract

This research, a year long narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), finds its origin in moments collected from my time spent alongside two children in a grade one-two classroom in a multicultural urban elementary school. Using a metaphor of a walk in the woods, I travelled alongside these children as they engaged with others on and off the school landscape in order to attend more deeply to their experiences of community. It was by inquiring into children's experiences, by re-collecting (Crites, 1971) the storied moments, that I was able to attend more deeply to the place of relational knowing (Hollingsworth, 1994) in the way children maintain narratively coherent stories to live by (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). My perspective as a narrative inquirer provided a framework for understanding what I saw, heard, and felt, as I experienced my time "in the woods" of my research. Field texts generated in my inquiry included student work, researcher field notes, and taped conversations with the two children, the classroom teacher, and parent of one child. Research texts included narrative accounts of the two children, storied classroom moments, and narrative verse from the perspective of the two children and their teacher. My research focused on the need to see big (Greene, 1995), to understand community as a lived experience. Attending in this way helped me see new possibilities for imagining community not as a place but as an unfolding, fluid, complex series of relationships that lie within and between people. By drawing on Lindemann Nelson's (1995) work on found and chosen communities, I imagine how schools and classrooms might become chosen communities, opening up new possibilities for living in relation with others.

Acknowledgements

This dissertation, like my life, is rooted in stories of relationship, in my experiences of being in community with others. Many people travelled with me in the woods of this work, and continue to travel with me in the woods of my life.

I will forever be grateful to Aaron, Sadie, and Gale, whose unfolding lives mingle with my own on the following pages. I am thankful for the many hours spent walking alongside them, sharing our experiences and our lives. The stories on these pages provide a framework for thinking relationally about lives in schools. Thank you also to Jeanette and Ravine School for being open to my wondering and wandering.

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Community as relationship is a metaphor that weaves through my dissertation as it weaves through my life. To Shaun Murphy and Anne Murray Orr, who travelled on this doctoral journey with me, thank you for the experience of living out a story of relational knowing.

Bill Maynes was once my principal, became my teacher, and remained my friend. I could never have imagined this journey without him. Sharon Jamieson, another member of my supervisory committee and whom I first met at the Centre, taught me much about vulnerability and possibility. Together with Bill and Sharon, I am also grateful to Maryanne Doherty and Joe Wu for their careful reading of my work and their thoughtful response to my stories.

I first encountered Sandra (Sam) Hollingsworth through her written words and her thoughts on teaching, learning, and relationship soon became central to my thinking, my writing, my stories to live by. I am thankful for how she has helped me linger in the wood between the worlds place.

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My sister Jane, my brother-in-law Paul, and my children Liam and Joanna help me make sense of the world. I have dedicated this dissertation to them, and to my parents, because they also help make my dreams come true. The joy of this accomplishment is shared with them.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council for the research grant to F. Michael Connelly and D. Jean Clandinin. Michael and Jean's invitation for me to walk alongside them in their work shaped my own research and understandings in profound ways.

A pebble does not enter a pond without a ripple moving out
and in time touching every single shore.
We are all, every one of us, in this thing together.
Susan Hillier Parks

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Chapter 1

So What's It All About?

When people ask me what my research is about, at times I answer that it is about community. Other times I say that it is about learning to attend to experience. Yet other times I say it is about lives of children in schools. All three answers are partial but telling. I know people are trying to be kind when they ask me about my research. I also know what they are looking for is a brief summary, a phrase or two that captures what I have spent years trying to understand, am still trying to understand. How do I explain what I don't fully understand? What I really want to say is, "Sit with me and linger awhile. What I would really like is to be able to tell you some stories about two of my research participants, Sadie[1] and Aaron. Maybe you can help me understand my research in a new way."

I might begin then with the story of the time Sadie wore a pair of snowpants to school that were several sizes too small. About how she was reluctant to go out to recess until her friend Seeta helped her negotiate a way to wear another pair that were much too large. I might talk about why I chose to walk alongside Sadie in her year one-two[2] classroom and why attending to that moment, that experience in her life, was important to my research, my knowing.

Or I might talk about the day Aaron returned to school after a lengthy absence, head freshly shaven after an episode with lice, and how his classmates all crowded around him, rubbing his head and calling out excitedly, "Aaron's here! Aaron's here!"

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[1] Pseudonyms are used for names of people and places to respect the anonymity of my participants.
[2] Because of the multi-age organization of the school where my research occurred, I refer to the children's year in school rather than grade. Year one-two refers to the group of diverse 6- and 7-year old children in the classroom.

This might lead to a conversation about how Aaron did not fit into a school story of community trying to be written for him.

Or I might begin with one of my childhood experiences, of memories growing up in a military family and of attending multiple schools on multiple landscapes. I would likely then make the connection between my narrative beginnings and the focus of my research.

Trinh (1989) tells me "Never does one open the discussion by coming right to the heart of the matter. For the heart of the matter is always somewhere else than where it is supposed to be" (p. 1). For me, the heart of my research is found in the stories. By beginning with a story I hope to let my research puzzle emerge, to make a connection with the person who was asking about my research—a connection to me and to the lives I was trying to understand in my research. What I hope to say through my stories is that my research, like community, is relational and it is best understood through the living and telling of relational lives. By making these connections through the telling of stories, together we might begin to imagine new ones to live and tell (Connelly & Clandinin, 1994).

You see, I want to say to these people who ask, what I am writing and what my research is about is not captured in a phrase or two. It is found in the stories of Aaron and Sadie, two young children who attended a primary classroom in an urban, multi-cultural, high-needs school in a western Canadian city. The stories I attended to are interconnected with the stories I lived as a researcher in their classroom, and for one of the children, also in his home. Their stories, my stories, our stories are also framed by the multiple ways I position myself as a researcher; as a teacher, a student, a mother, a counsellor, and a

teacher-educator. There are many stories to tell and more than one way to tell them. So what my research is about lies somewhere in the middle of all three of the answers I typically offer, and the overlapping of three lives in an 18-month period in and around a school. It is lingering in that space that helps me hear and attend to the stories being lived out. My dissertation is my way of asking you to sit down with a cup of coffee or tea and linger with me awhile.

Beginning from Experience

Jean Little, in her memoir, *Little by Little* (Little, 1987), recalls a childhood moment where she learned to live and think as a writer after she lined up a fleet of orange slices on her windowsill. Looking at the tableau she created, she vowed to "remember, as long as I live, how these orange boats look right now" (p. 92). For Little, the orange slices represented a fixed point in time that was captured first in her memory and then in her writing. They also represented how she began to attend to experiences in her life. Little recalls "the world outside was dark, and the wood of the windowsill was a mahogany brown. The orange segments glowed against the sombre background" (p. 92). While the window was the landscape that framed the experience of the orange segments, it was the "bright little boats" that became the metaphor for her experience.

Unlike Jean Little, I have few childhood memories. Growing up the youngest of five children in an air force family, my childhood years were spent travelling from one military base to another. By the time I graduated from high school I had attended eight schools and lived in 10 different places. I retain only fragments of my time in school and of moving in and out of these places. As the place I was living as a child was continually

shifting, I am rarely able to fix that time into separate, distinct memories. I have often wondered where those memories have gone. But instead, in their places are the experiences that are written on my body and left behind in what I know to be important. It is the place of embodied knowledge (Johnson, 1989) that provides me the foundation from which my narratives of experience are constructed. Johnson uses the term embodied knowledge to describe the knowing from experience we carry with us in our bodies. Embodied knowledge is revealed in our stories, our narratives of experience, illuminating not merely a rational surface knowledge but a deeper knowing embedded with feelings, values, and memories.

When I wonder about my childhood there are no distinct orange slices parading like a fleet of tiny, little boats. Instead, the window of my memory opens onto a landscape filled with family, with schools, with friends that would come and go, and with a knowledge that we would never stay in one place for too long. One way to read the story of my multiple childhood moves is of outsider continually looking for entry points into new communities. The term community often calls to mind images around consensus and shared beliefs. This conventional understanding, at times, does not attend to issues of complexity, diversity, and an unfolding nature of relationships. I realize now that it is this concept of community, a very conventional and common way of thinking about community, that I have primarily come to see in the research literature. While I will say more about this later, my research alongside Sadie and Aaron is not about an outsider/insider story of fixed boundaries understanding of community (Kliewer, 1998). Nor is it about capturing a gemeinschaft/geselleschaft (Sergiovanni, 1994; Tonnies, 1957 (Originally published in 1887)), personal/impersonal understanding of life in schools.

Although you may choose to read it in one of these ways, for me, community is much more complex than that. I prefer to look at it "less as an entity and more as a kind of awareness in process" (Eakin, 1999, p. x). Community is something that occurs between people and has both an unfolding and enfolding, yet slightly intangible quality. In my research I planned, like Paley (1981; 1990; 1997), to pay close attention to personal narratives and hear what goes on in the lives of children in a classroom, in the context of their lives.

Childhood Moments Recalled

My only constant community growing up was my family. We held on to this story of community, in face of the multiple moves, through the stories of make-believe and tradition. Moving around but always with my family—in a home where reading and books were important—we were accustomed to making up stories and living them out over and over again. "Riverboat," a game derived from many readings of *Treasure Island* (Stevenson, 1957) where my brothers' bunk beds became the pirate ship and the ladder a pirate's plank, was a favourite. Each week my father would pack us up and take us to the local library. My sister and I loved the junior book encyclopedias. Those pages became the starting point for many of our shared adventures, beginning with games of pretend. We taught ourselves to dance from the illustrated pictures of two ballerinas and named ourselves Kittie and Katie, names also borrowed from other pieces of literature. We carry those names with us almost 40 years later, the letter "K" inscribed on our matching silver bracelets. Although growing up I seldom celebrated Christmas in the same home twice, for me Christmas dinner still begins with a toast of tomato juice from the same glasses I

used as a child and ends with a bite of cookie cake shaped like a yuletide log. In my mind I can return to scenes in my childhood where I was happy, loved, accepted, and embraced, and these scenes all revolve around my family.

A story given to me of who I am.

Growing up the youngest of five siblings, I never knew life without a crowd of people around me. My mom said I was born social. This was a story given to me of who I am—a story I learned to tell of myself. Many of my childhood memories are ones that have been put there by the stories told by my siblings. The mouldy sandwich story is one they still love to tell. To my brothers and sisters, this story reinforces the notion that as the youngest in the family I "got away" with more than my share. Ask any of them and they will relish telling you of an old, mouldy sandwich discovered behind the fridge in our PMQ (private married quarters) when I was a toddler. When the smell emanating from behind the fridge finally led to the discovery of the sandwich, each of my siblings, in turn, was blamed and then sent to their room when they would not admit to having stored the unwanted and uneaten sandwich behind the refrigerator. Being only three and the baby of the family, I was never questioned and was allowed to continue my play. Somehow, this part has never been made clear—did I confess?—it was discovered that I was the one who, instead of eating my lunch, had hidden the sandwich behind the fridge. In the story my siblings tell I was never punished. This memory has been carried forward, likely embellished, and continues to remain a family story. I do not remember the experience of the sandwich and the fridge. But I remember hearing the story many times

over the years. For me, all that is left is the story and the sense it brings me of belonging to a family.

When I look at the experience of community from the gaze of my growing up years I understand it as connecting with my family, of sharing lived stories, of carrying forward traditions that keep me moving forward but connected to the past.

Beginning To Record My Own Stories

When I graduated from university with my undergraduate degree I decided to take a year to travel. I was given the gift of a journal and, for the first time, began to record my own stories of experience. My siblings were no longer around to help me recall the adventures of my life, and like Jean Little recognized when she was a little girl, I began to see that "my life [was] something that belonged to me, and [I] began to put small scraps of time away in a place where I could take them out and look at them whenever I needed to remember" (Little, 1987, p. 93). Twenty years later I continue to write and tuck away those "small scraps of time" and pull them out whenever I need to remember.

Unlike Jean Little, there was no one defining moment when I would come to see myself as a writer, a teacher, a researcher, as someone interested in understanding the experience of community. For me, the story unfolds much more slowly. It begins in my growing up years, in my multiple moves alongside my family. The story continues today.

From Miss Mylrea to a room of my own.

When I was 10 years old I met Miss Mylrea. I remember her long brown hair. Miss Mylrea was my Grade 5 teacher. I do not remember what we studied that year in her

class, where I sat, or the names of my classmates, but I remember feeling that my presence in the classroom mattered. I remember staying after school most days to wipe down the blackboards or clean out the hamster's cage. I remember sharing stories of my life with Miss Mylrea and listening to her speak of what it was like to be a beginning teacher. I remember entering a public speaking competition and having my teacher sit right next to my parents. I remember that it was Miss Mylrea who suggested I wear my black MaryJane shoes as they would remind me of my sister of the same name and make me feel like I was not alone on stage. It was Miss Mylrea who also told me that I would make a great teacher. For me it was not one moment in Miss Mylrea's classroom, but a series of moments in relation with her, that is part of my unfolding experience of becoming a teacher. She gave me a story that would shape my evolving narrative of experience, a story of being a teacher.

Thirteen years after meeting Miss Mylrea I had a classroom of my own. That was the year I met Gary. I move reluctantly towards this memory of Gary.

Remembering Gary.

"To Ms. Pearce #1 Teacher. Love, Gary." So reads the silver plate hiding at the back of my china cabinet. I still remember how little Gary was; so much smaller than the other children in the classroom, his little upturned nose, his tiny face filled with freckles, his two front teeth, uneven and too large for his face. In my memory Gary is forever seven years old. I remember how his arms and legs always seemed to be in motion even when he was sitting still. I remember how his favourite sound was the wail of a fire engine. I can still see him scurrying underneath the classroom desks chasing some unseen

but imagined danger. I liked Gary but I worried about the responsibility of being his teacher. I struggled with allowing our stories to live side by side and not letting a "teacher as leader" story dominate. We were in an old run-down portable detached from the school. I had been given my choice of three assignments when my teaching contract was renewed. Everyone, me included, was surprised when I chose the E.M.H. (Educable Mentally Handicapped) class: 13 children aged 6–10 in an old portable used previously for storage. We had to run out the door and through the parking lot into the main school to use the bathroom. My kids used to get in trouble for running a lot. I remember Gary running out the fire exit once. He had pulled his clothes off—down to his underwear. It was the dead of winter and the snow banks were much taller than his tiny three-foot frame in this northern Canadian city. How had I not seen him strip off his clothes? I remember the sound of the fire engine and the blast of the cold air as he opened the fire escape door. I reached him but not until he had jumped in a snow bank. He was smiling. I was not. Had he imagined his body on fire? I don't know. I was only worried that someone might have seen this escapade and that somehow it was all my fault for not having better classroom control. I remember Gary: the feel of his fists as he pummelled my back. I sat on him one day, gently I was imagining, so he couldn't run away. The other children gathered in front of me as I read a story. What was the story? I can't remember the story. I remember the feel of the fists. I remember behavioural consultants from the city visiting my room. "You're doing a great job," they would tell me. Smarties. Stickers. Behaviour Modification Charts. Fists. Sirens. I'm doing a great job? I remember Gary's mother on the last day of school. Had I seen or talked to her at other times? I don't know. Gary had a silver plate in his hands. I remember him reading the inscription. There

were tears in his mother's eyes as she told me they were moving—back east to be with family. They were alone in this small northern city, Gary's mom was unemployed and she longed for family support. She told me Gary had loved school for the first time this year. Every night he would tell her stories from his days at school. Did he tell her about the fists? I find it hard to look at the plate. But I keep it to remind me of stories that are hard to tell. Of stories that shape my life.

Why do I recall the story of Gary? I remember the experience so clearly—not as a story from 20 years ago but as a story from yesterday and today. It is a story I pull forward in my desire to understand the experience of community on a school landscape. It is a story I now narratively inquire into, placing that remembered story in a new context as it moves me towards a shock of *awakeness* (Greene, 1995). I realize now I can only begin to recognize others as I meet them against my own lived experience. Gary is a story from my past that continues to reverberate in my present. Conle (1996) refers to this way of seeing one experience in terms of another as resonance. When people's stories interact they have a mutually shaping effect. When I use my remembered story of Gary as a "sense-making tool, it leaves [me] myriad occasions for resonance" (p. 313).

That year with Gary, my first as an elementary school teacher, I spent most of the month of August preparing my classroom. I removed the clutter from the portable, transforming the old storage area into an inviting classroom. I washed down walls, steam cleaned carpets, decorated bulletin boards, made place cards for every student, arranged the desks into cooperative learning groups, and prepared multi-level learning stations around the room. From the five-point Likert scale on the evaluation from my student teaching experiences, I came to understand the importance of classroom climate. The

well-decorated bulletin boards and the many other visuals and displays in my very first "real" teaching experience showed that I had learned this lesson well. I also wrote and mailed personalized letters to each student "naming" myself as teacher, welcoming them into my classroom. At the time I saw myself trying to create what I loosely thought of as classroom community, a place where students would feel comfortable and excited about joining. I did not see it as extending the community students already had, but of creating a new and exciting place in which they were invited to enter. I was asking them to name themselves only as students, not as sons or daughters, brothers or sisters. I do not even recall if there were any parents that first day. All I noticed was the children. (How was it that the children actually arrived at school, I now wonder?) Did I ever invite parents into the classroom? I know that not once that year did I ever venture out to the children's homes—to experience anything about their lives beyond the classroom walls. I was living out a story of school as being separate from home. As a new member of this northern city I let my own stories of what a classroom should look, feel, and be like take up residence while leaving little more than cracks for children's and parents' stories to seep in. I saw myself as "the bestower of place and belonging" (Paley, 2004, p. 19) in the classroom. I understood what I was trying to do through the language of classroom climate, routines, and management. I saw my role as classroom leader, responsible for setting the tone and direction of the learning.

Pushor (2001) uses the metaphor of a protectorate which now helps me think about my teaching year up north and how my expert teacher knowledge allowed me to act as the head of the protectorate, making decisions that positioned parents on the outside of the classroom door. I rarely left an opportunity for student voices to be truly

heard and likely none at all for parent voices. So when Gary's mom arrived on that last day I was surprised when she talked of moving "home." Until that moment, if I had given it any thought at all, I assumed this northern city was home. Gary never told me anything about his family, his home, his experiences outside school—I wonder if I ever asked. Where was my commitment to dialogue in this classroom place? Yet, according to his mother, Gary often talked about his experiences of school at home. She was able to make connections for him between home and school. I only attended to Gary as a student in my special education classroom. I was told by his previous teachers that Gary was "a troubled young boy with significant learning disabilities." I did not know him as a son, a brother, a child living outside the school. I did not even know the stories Gary told of his experiences at school. I worked to make Gary conform to my narrow understanding of a community in the classroom, but I wonder how he experienced this classroom. In looking at our classroom only from my position as teacher, there is much I missed, much that was invisible and marginalized. I wonder now about Gary's and his mother's experiences as they moved from home to school to home. What might I have understood if I had positioned myself alongside Gary or his mother? I wonder how Gary experienced his entry into my classroom. It was a place where I storied myself as leader of the classroom, a story I thought would lead to the building of a strong classroom climate. What more could I have learned had I stepped away from a leadership story (Barth, 1990) and towards a relational story (Hollingsworth, 1994; Huber, 1999; Paley, 1997)? What might I have understood about classrooms if I saw them not simply as places but as spaces for relationship? What might I have learned from attending to Gary in his multiple ways of being? What stories might he have told? What other stories might we have lived

together? Now, in looking back at this experience, I wonder what type of community was being shaped in this classroom. I still feel Gary's fists on my back trying to drum into me stories that he was unable to share because I was unable to listen. When I look far enough into the past to who I am, I begin to see the future. Gary's story mingles with others' stories on this research journey of mine.

Beginning to ask questions.

It was not until the beginning of my master's course work that I began to understand experience from a lens of community. Several years after working with Gary, I moved to a larger urban area where I once again was a teacher of children identified as special needs. Through a year spent learning alongside a group of 14 young boys, their families, and a new teaching assistant, I came to wonder about issues such as voice, diversity, segregated classrooms, classroom community, and relationship. In my master's research (Pearce, 1995), I began to explore these wonders that remain with me today.

Storied at the margins.

I am reminded of another, more recent, story. It was the end of September not long ago and I was told that three boys had just enrolled in the LOGOS (Christian) program at the school where I was working as counsellor. Until that time the boys had been home-schooled by their mother. Dad brought them in to register, along with a younger brother not yet old enough for school. We were told Mom recently moved out of the home and Dad and his boys were having a tough time coping with this unexpected loss. Dad was unemployed and the family was struggling financially.

We looked at the birth dates of the three oldest boys and placed them in Kindergarten, Grade 2, and Grade 4. Within their first week in their new classrooms the Grades 2 and 4 teachers came to me asking for help. The two oldest boys were having trouble settling in and they were both significantly behind their classmates academically. Both were still unable to read.

Requests for special education funding had to be submitted by mid-October, so, after receiving the dad's written permission, I completed psycho-educational assessments on the two older boys. There was no surprise when test results indicated, according to district guidelines, that the boys were both identified as "learning disabled." Funding applications, requesting teacher aide support, were completed the day before the deadline for requests. I thought this was a mere formality as both boys met the stated criteria, as indicated solely by the test percentiles. Within a few days I received notice that the applications were rejected as the family, who lived in a small and tired home just beyond the city limits, was declared "out-of-district." At the same time, the family was given formal notice through the district office that the boys were able to complete the year in their current classroom, but would receive no extra district special education support.

Within the school, accommodations were quietly made to give the boys some extra assistance. We tried to resist the message coming from our district office. We put the dad in contact with family therapy workers and arranged for respite care as well as community kitchen support.

June came and we noticed that the boys had perfect attendance! Dad informed us that the boys would be staying with us the following year and the youngest child would now be entering Kindergarten. As class lists were prepared an email arrived from our

district office stating that unless this family provided a local address they would be unable to re-enrol at our school. "Any out-of-district student with identified special needs is the responsibility of his or her home district," I read. The father and I cried together when we realized there was no room for negotiation. Although he had worked odd jobs during the school year, he was again unemployed. Their home had been for sale for over six months, and until it sold, the family was unable to consider moving within boundaries, into the city. He wasn't sure what to do and I wasn't sure how to help. It was the last week of school and I was packing up my office as I would not be returning the following fall. I was off to begin doctoral studies, leaving this family to navigate a way forward on their own. I recall wondering what September would bring for this dad and his boys.

I had forgotten about this story until I was driving home from work one day over a year later. I saw this father walking with his four young boys. He was holding hands with the youngest as the others were running ahead, jumping to touch the leaves in the overhanging trees. I came home and sat with my paper and pencil, wondering about my own complicity in this family being positioned as squatters (Kliewer, 1998) on the margins, as a burden to my school and district. I wonder if I had shifted my position away from school counsellor to that of parent or friend, if I could have imagined a different way of being in relation with this family. This father and his four boys stood on the wrong side of the border "created between children described as impaired and presumed to require the technology of special education and those who participated as normal members of the regular classroom" (Kliewer, 1998, p. 45). I recalled how the boys had all been home-schooled prior to registering at our school. I wonder how they experienced

their move onto the school landscape—did they experience a struggle of borders (Anzaldúa, 1987)? What must they have risked by exposing their story necessitating a move onto a school landscape? Would the stories they lived and told have been full of excitement or of vulnerability and isolation?

In storying myself only as school counsellor, did I contribute to their story of living outside the margins of a fixed understanding of community as a place with centres and margins?

There are many ways of revisiting this remembered story from my recent past. When I unpack it from an understanding of community as place, the message to the family is "you do not belong to my story of community." Anzaldúa (1987) tells me "it is not enough to stand on the opposite river bank" (p. 100). She challenges me to take a counterstance and leave my place on the riverbank and step toward a new possibility of being in relation, a relation that does not include rigid boundaries.

When I unpack the story from an understanding of community as citizenship, the message is one of exclusion and inclusion. The family has no status within the district community. The boys are deemed different because of their attributed academic deficiencies. The logic that seems to underlie the reason for the family's exclusion from the community is that the boys are an unnecessary burden who would divert finite funding opportunities from those that have privileged status as citizens of the community (Kliewer, 1998). For that reason, the family should be banished.

Maybe the boys would have been allowed to stay had it not been for the special needs identification resulting from my testing. This storied moment of banishment makes me wonder about Kliewer's (1998) notion of the privileged status of citizen in a

community and the multiple ways there are to belong to or be situated within a community. It calls me to attend to *bordercrossings* (Anzaldúa, 1987) that parents and children, teachers and counsellors, and even school and district administrators, might need to improvise and negotiate as they experience community on a school landscape.

When I unpack the story from an understanding of community as relationship, it becomes much more complex and messy. There are multiple stories of relationship embedded within this story. One set of relationships I had is with the teachers in the school. What did it mean for them to come to me with stories of children struggling in their classrooms? Their concerns came from a place of care and knowing that I would try to help. My relationship with the teachers was also nested within my relationship with school and district administration. I was an employee of a school board, which implied that I was responsible to the policies that had been established, but this was a relationship that caused me great discomfort. What I really was trying to call forward in my actions was my relationship with the family, but I was unable to see any possibilities for helping them stay at the school.

This story causes me great problems when I try to think of community as relationship. There were multiple intersecting relationships occurring within this story. Which relationship counts first? My experience suggested to me that the story of school took precedence over any relational sense of community I may have had with the family. When the story of school is privileged it moves an understanding of community back into a citizenship story. I wonder what a community of relationship might have looked like in this story. It is not easy to know. I imagine it would have been messy and complex and even improvisational. I see now how staying with an understanding of community as

relationship with the boys and the father was a *counterstory* (Lindemann Nelson, 1995), a way of resisting the dominant story of school. I wonder, also, if this understanding of community opens up possibilities for multiplicity, diversity, and intersecting lives. I also wonder, had I stayed at the school the following September, if I would have been able to stay with the tensions I was experiencing in this lived story.

Returning to this story now, I wonder what this dad's experience of coming to school might have been like. I wonder about how the boys' experienced entering a classroom for the first time, a few weeks into the beginning of a new school year. This story of the father and his four boys was a difficult story for me to return to and reminds me of the need to attend to the moments when storied lives bump up against stories of school. It carries with me an experience of living with tension on school landscapes. It also reminds me that ongoing dialogue and human association is central to understanding and living community (Dewey, 1916).

Stories Lived But Not Told

The unravelling of my research puzzle is seen, heard, and understood through the stories I live and tell. "People live stories, and in the telling of these stories, reaffirm them, modify them, and create new ones. Stories lived and told educate the self and others" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. xxvi). However, much can also be learned from stories lived but not told.

I once thought I would include the story of Nick, a pre-service teacher I taught just prior to entering my doctoral program, as it was he who first raised within me wonders about my experience of community and about the experiences of others. But in

choosing not to bring his story into awareness, I realized that sometimes the wonders that come out of a storied moment are as important as the moment itself. My lived but silent story of Nick reminds me of the work of Anna Neumann (1997) who wrote a post-Holocaust biography about her parents. It is not only through her father's words but also through her mother's silences that the story emerges. Neumann teaches me that "the stories I hear of others' lives are composed only partly of text; they are also composed of silence for which no text can exist" (p. 92). And so, in my lived but untold story of Nick, and in other stories told or hinted at through words, silences, or absences in my research writings, I begin to glimpse a little bit more about what it means to experience community.

Coming To the Table

I first learned to engage in conversation with my stories and inquire more deeply into them at the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development (Centre) at the University of Alberta. The Centre is a formal landscape but also reflects the people who gather there. There is a large table that dominates the Centre. Actually it is a collection of several tables pushed together with chairs encircling the outer edges. Conversation moves in circles around the table, drawing everybody forwards and backwards, inwards and outwards in the telling of their stories. It is a place where narrative inquiry shapes the plotline. All those gathered share a similar passion for learning to engage in relational forms of inquiry.

Coming to the table
Feeling new—nothing to say
The people—the stories—pulling me in.

The Centre table
Holds a place for everyone who comes,
For everyone who returns,
For everyone who lingers behind.
A space for conversation
The unfolding of stories.

Coming to the table
Sharing worries and wonders
Beginnings as a narrative inquirer
Allowing stories to live by
helping me imagine who I am . . . who I am becoming.

Moving our stories backward and forward . . . inward too
Encouraging wondering and wandering.

Coming to the table
People bring their whole selves.
I bring my whole self now.
On the threshold—present to experience.

There's something about the space.
A rhythm develops
Allowing time to get to know one another.
A sense of recognition,
A relational thread—attaching to something that has gone before
Carrying us like waves on water.
The presence of people and their stories continue to surround us
—to sustain us
—to keep us afloat.

Coming to the table
We name ourselves
Moving in a circle
As we learn to attend.
Finding our stories nested in the stories of others
—the in-between of who you are and who I am
—a relational way of being
Capturing moments in life
. . . trying to understand self
on this continually changing landscape.

Coming to the table
In conversation with my heart.
Being in the space stays with me
And carries me along wherever I go.

I am learning to let myself go...
to be carried along on the waves
of conversation.

As I come to the table.

(found poem[3] created from a conversation between Anne Murray Orr, Pam Steeves, and Marni Pearce, March 2002)

For me and for others who gather there, the Centre seems to be a home place (hooks, 1990) as we struggle for narrative coherence in the stories we live and tell. I borrow the term narrative coherence from Carr (1986) who wrote, "What we are doing is telling and retelling, to ourselves and to others, the story of what we are about and what we are" (p. 97). At the Centre we are invited to see our inquiries, our lives, as works-in-progress, and learn to illustrate the intersection of the personal with study.

When I returned to the Centre in 2001, after an absence of several years, I began by telling the story of my beginning doctoral journey. I experienced the Centre as a *living in the midst* space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), a making-sense place as I talked about my worries, my fears, my wonders, my hopes. Sometimes I would share stories of my son's life as it was unfolding during his year in Grade 1. These were troubling stories for me but as I placed them out on the Centre table, others would pick them up, gently cradle them, and offer them back to me, framed by a different lens, suggesting new possibility. Others around the table helped me to inquire deeper into my stories through their responses. They gave back my stories in ways that helped me recognize the tensions in my stories that allowed me to imagine new stories to live by (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). I recognized these ideas of response as the giving back of stories as Clandinin and

[3] I use found poetry here (Butler-Kisber, 1998; Richardson, 1997) as a form of embodied speech to evoke the emotion and the sense of engagement I have experienced at the Centre table with colleagues.

Connelly's (1994) work, work I had first encountered in my master's studies. Gradually I learned how to live as a narrative inquirer (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) as I began to think narratively about my own life.

Learning to name myself.

Zoom—Zoom, Astronaut.

Do you know your name or not?

(Joanna, age 4, personal communication, 2002)

My daughter came skipping in the door one day after preschool a few years ago. It was during the second year of my doctoral program. Joanna brought with her a new song she had just learned. Her experiences of preschool were always relived again at home. She told me that circle time was her favourite part of her school day. She liked the sharing of songs and stories and being able to cuddle up to friends on the carpet. Her story of sitting in a circle with friends, singing a naming song, reminded me of the Centre table, the circle time of my adulthood—a space for naming myself in multiple ways.

The Centre table is where I began to learn to name myself as a researcher, a narrative inquirer. I experienced the Centre as a space for relational knowing (Hollingsworth, 1994), as an inquiry community. My wonders about my own narrative beginnings emerged from the story of my experience at the table. It caused me to attend to what I have learned about being a narrative inquirer, about what I have learned about relational inquiry, about what I understand about community.

I first entered my doctoral program with no definitive question, but an interest in the relationship between education, experience, and life (Dewey, 1938). At the Centre, I

began to see that coming to know my research puzzle would only happen in the unfolding of the stories of my own life. I learned to be patient with myself and to see how my knowing was interconnected with others' stories of experience. Taking time for conversation and wonder required thoughtful consideration of my work, which, in turn, seemed to help me prepare for writing down and inquiring into my stories. "The mere telling of a story leaves it as a fixed entity. It is in the inquiry, in our conversations with each other, with texts, with situations, and with other stories that we can come to retelling our stories and to reliving them" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1998, p. 251).

Naming My Research Puzzle

Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly (2000) speak of the research problem or research question as a research puzzle. I have always liked this term as it speaks to me of rough edges, of uncertainty, and of multiple possibilities. In formalizing my wonders about the experience of community for my doctoral research, I chose not to identify with a single research question—that might imply I was searching for a solution.

I returned to the Centre as a doctoral student, but I was also present as a teacher, a counsellor, a teacher educator, a colleague, a daughter, a sister, and always very centrally, a parent. I continue to live multiple storylines—the multiplicity of who I am. As I began to pay attention to my wonders about how I experienced community, I began to understand that my experience of community was dependent on which part of me I pulled forward in the stories I was retelling and reliving. It helped me understand that others also experienced community through their own multiple ways of being.

It was the Centre table that first provided me with a three-dimensional inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), a space bounded by dimensions of time, place, and the personal and social, a space that helped me understand how to live relationally and narratively in the world.

> *There is fiction in the space between*
> *The lines on your page of memories*
> *Write it down but it doesn't mean*
> *You're not just telling stories*
> *There is fiction in the space between*
> *You and me.* (Chapman, 2000, track 1)

When I sit at the Centre table I experience community occurring through the interlapping (Huber & Whelan, 2000) of people and their stories. It is what lies in the space between the telling of the stories and the listening that occurs. *"There is fiction in the space between,"* sings Tracy Chapman (2000). "That's it," I want to say to people who ask me about my research, when I am searching for a short answer. But how do I say that my research is about the space between people—the space of community? I began to realize that when I spoke of the experience of community it was the experience of relationships I meant. For me, it's all about relationships. About staying in conversation even when moments of tension surface. I'm not interested in just telling stories, but *telling* stories, inquiring into the places of tension that help me inquire more deeply into the story of who I am and who I am becoming and into the story of my research, in relational ways. Debbie Schroeder (1996) writes of a *middle space*, a place with room for stories of multiplicity, of inquiry, of relationship. Growing up I became accustomed to moving and leaving people without sustained time to develop this middle space of connection. I became good at saying goodbye. Hello… Goodbye. In my research I wanted to live in that space between hello and goodbye, that space *within and between*

(Trinh, 1989) myself and others. My research puzzle has a beginning place in the story of my growing up. But it is also situated in other storied moments of my life and in the fiction between people.

Moving my puzzle forward.

My work as a teacher, counsellor, teacher-educator, and parent moved me to consider attending to my puzzle of what it means to experience community on a school landscape. What is the experience of "coming to the table" like for children in school? As I directed my attention to a school landscape, I pulled forward images of the Centre table. I began to wonder about the table as a metaphor for understanding children's experiences of being in community on a school landscape. What might be their understanding of their experiences as they came to a school landscape? How might they make sense of their knowing—their stories as lived and relived? I wondered how young children might name themselves in their school/classroom community? What might be the multiple plotlines they live out? How would the multiplicity of their lives shape their experiences of being in community?

The focus of my research puzzle then was on the lived experiences of two children as told through their personal narratives on a school landscape. My understanding of experience as both personal and social is shaped by John Dewey (1938) who described it this way:

> An experience is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment, whether the latter consists of persons with whom he is talking about some topic or event, the subject

> talked about being also a part of the situation; or the toys with which he is playing; the book he is reading…or the materials of an experiment he is performing. The environment, in other words, is whatever conditions interact with personal needs, desires, purposes, and capacities to create the experience which is had. (pp. 43-44)

My understanding is further shaped by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) who believe that "there is always a history, it is always changing, and it is always going somewhere" (p. 2). They remind me that, as a narrative inquirer, I am interested in "*making meaning* of experience" (p. 80) as shared through lived and told stories.

Attending to Meanings of Community

A professor once encouraged me to look at words related to the word community in hopes of giving me a better understanding of the word. Communion means "a sharing, esp. of thoughts" (Allen, 1990, p. 230); commune (v), to "speak confidentially and intimately" (p. 229); common "shared by, coming from, or done by, more than one (p. 229)." To me, many of these definitions were entwined and difficult to separate. My friend and research colleague, Shaun Murphy, told me that whenever I talk about community I use it as a verb rather than a noun. He's right. I wonder if that is why I can sometimes be in a group of people, in what is named a community, without feeling in community. I wonder if that was Gary's experience or the experience of the father and his four young boys. I know from my lived story with Nick that it was part of his university experience. As a verb, community has a sense of fluidity, of being a living, evolving activity. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* (Allen, 1990) defines community in this way:

"Community (n): **1 a** all the people living in a specific locality; a specific locality, including its inhabitants. **2** a body of people having a religion, a profession, etc. in common. **3** fellowship of interests, etc. similarity (community of intellect) (p. 230)." I want to scribble a #4 in the margins of my dictionary: **4** the between space that occurs when two or more people are in a mutually caring, sustained relationship and where voice is central to each of their knowing. But even as I scribble this #4, I am not satisfied. Even this does not quite capture what I am trying to imagine.

My father's daughter.

The view that each participant is engaged in the act of *composing a life* (Bateson, 1989) and *learning along the way* (Bateson, 1994) becomes central to understanding community as a lived experience. So I came to my research puzzle drawing on the ideas of Dewey (1916; 1934; 1938), Clandinin and Connelly (2000; 1988; 1990; 1994; 1998; 1999), and also Bateson (1989; 1994; 2000) as they helped me attend to the lived and told stories of two children sharing with me their experiences of community on a school landscape. I attended to my research puzzle drawing from my own experiences of childhood and of being a daughter, a teacher, a counsellor, a teacher educator, a parent, and a member of the Centre table. I was interested in a space that attended to issues around caring, relationships, vulnerability, and tension in the sharing of stories, of lives, and of inquiring into experience.

The chair is soft
I can feel the place
where my back makes an indentation in the leather.
My body feels as if it could get lost in this chair.

(Journal Entry, February 12, 2002)

The week before my father died I found myself at the Centre for our weekly Research Issues conversation. I situated myself within the conversation at the table, trying hard to pay attention to the surrounding stories, and trying hard to keep my own inner stories at a distance.

Although I was able to remain quiet, I was not able to remain on the margins. The stories I heard coursed through my body, mingling with the story I was living as daughter that day alongside my father. Many people around the table, but not all, knew the story I was living. They responded to my silence from a place of care, a place that Noddings (1992) describes as a state of being in relation. Hollingsworth (1994) and Connelly and Clandinin (1994) also help me understand my need for being part of the Centre space during this time in my life. The Centre is a space of relationship, of collaboration, a space for making connections through sharing our stories, silent and spoken. It is this understanding of relationship that informs my work.

When I am in sustained relationship with others I bring my lived stories with me. There was vulnerability in that moment at the table—vulnerability in those who were witness to the story I was living alongside my father and my own vulnerability in exposing my story. Being vulnerable means becoming known, and Behar (1996) suggests it requires "a keen understanding of what aspects of the self are the most important filters through which one perceives the world" (p. 13). It was this sense of being known that I wanted to experience with my participants.

Voices move over me, circle around me.
What are they saying?
Speak louder—I cannot hear your words.
Drown out my worries.
I am feeling fragile today.
My dad is ill. I want to be with him.

My children are with a babysitter.
I need them here with me.
I sink into the chair, feeling its warmth. (Journal Entry, February 12, 2002)

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) help me understand the tension I was experiencing in this moment at the Centre table. It was the tension that caused me to attend to who I was and was becoming in relation to my Centre colleagues, my children, my father, and my future research participants. Attending to places of tension in experience helps me turn inward and outward, backwards and forwards as I situate an experience within the context of a life. In my research, I explore the moments of tension as I awaken to children's stories to live by as I move to understand community from a place of experience.

Writings on Community

As I continue to attend to writings on community, I see a shift away from understanding schools as organizations to people's experience of them as places of community. Arguing that this is not merely a semantic change, Sergiovanni (1994) sees the shift constituting a positive move dealing with notions of collaboration, collegiality, commitment, and caring; yet his focus is still on the *place* not on people's *experience*. It is as if he assumes that *someone* can make a place for community for *someone else*. I wonder how Sergiovanni sees difference as being lived out in community—difference in culture, understanding, perspective, power, and situatedness. Shields and Seltzer's (1997) work helps me re-examine my understanding of community. They help me imagine school as a moral community, a community of difference and a community of dialogue—a concept that is both vague and complex. They write, "one of the paradoxes of

community, it appears, is the need to recognize difference and otherness while finding a purpose or meaning for bringing people together" (p. 429). They welcome an embrace of community that moves away from the normative concepts associated with the "homogeneity of gemeninschaft" (p. 414) as written about by Tonnies (1957 (Originally published in 1887)) and Sergiovanni, yet their focus is still on community as a *place*, not as an *experience*. As they ask for schools to be grounded in a community of dialogue, I am reminded of Craig's (1992) notion of knowledge communities. Craig writes of a knowledge community as "a group of people 'dwelling together' in common meaning which is storied and re-storied through conversations which shape and are shaped in community" (p. 107). She speaks of shared time, place, and situation as the commonalities for what each person experiences as a community.

Barth (1990) also writes about schools as *places* of community, as if each person experiences the same thing. For him, shared authority is a central term, but only as it appears to relate to principals and teachers. He sees the development of a community of leaders as allowing for the existence of a community of learners. It appears as if the diversity and complexity of lives are reduced to stories of "how-to." Reflecting on my experience with Gary during my first year of teaching, I started to see that this might have been how I was thinking about community at that time. My story of making a community for Gary was a leadership story or an insider/outsider understanding of community, but now I wonder about the story of leadership in community. Barth deals primarily with the principal's role in creating the conditions for school improvement resulting in an environment of collegiality over congeniality. I wonder about the place of students or of parents in his understanding. I think Barth sees community as something

external in which he can participate, perhaps even something he can develop. I wonder about the moral tensions that surround this understanding of community.

Lindemann Nelson (1995) helps me understand an alternative way of understanding community as a place; that communities can be constructed and interpreted in multiple ways. She points out that communities of place, what she identifies as "found communities" (p. 24), have often been responsible for the exclusion and suppression of non-community members and the exploitation and oppression of some members who identify as part of the community. She offers up a counterstory when suggesting that "communities of choice" (p. 24) offer places where people can come together in a moral space to reflect upon questions of identity, purpose, and even possible resistance or insubordination. I wonder about communities of choice that evolve within found communities of the classroom.

Fielding (2000) shares my understanding of community as a process as he writes of community from a perspective of mutuality and reciprocity. He says,

> A community is not fundamentally about place, time, memory, or even the belonging or significance in close relationships. Community is rather the reciprocal experience people have as persons in certain kinds of relationships; it is an experience of being that is alive in its mutuality and vibrant in its sense of possibility…Community is a way of being, not a thing. Community is a process in which human beings regard each other in a certain way…and in which they relate to each other and act together in mutuality as persons, not as occupants…that mutuality is informed by the values of freedom (freedom to become yourself) and equality (equal worth) which conditions each other reciprocally. (p. 401)

Understanding community as an "experience of being" and not a "place" or "time" creates possibilities for dialogue, responsiveness, and a common ground for understanding differences, with the possibility for transformative action. In this way boundaries are blurred.

An understanding of community as a place affords a vision of seeing things small (Greene, 1995) of looking "at schooling through the lenses of a system—a vantage point of power or existing ideologies—taking a primarily technical point of view" (p. 11). Greene's notions of *seeing big* and *seeing small* allowed me an imaginative way of thinking about my research puzzle. Seeing small happens when we stand back from the individual lives of people with whom we are in relation and instead look at a social group in order to understand its social structure, values, and interests. While seeing things in this way may be important to those interested in understanding emerging trends of school or learning communities, my research puzzle unfolded from an interest in my own narrative beginnings. In the multiple ways I have lived alongside others on school landscapes, I have been interested in understanding experience. I wanted to see the particularities of those who, when seeing small, would be seen to be part of the community. People's experiences were the beginning place for my research. I wanted to see community "big" to afford me an opportunity to move close to the lives of my research participants. According to Greene, it was by attending to my participants' storied lives that I could see big and have a fuller and richer understanding of the experience of community. So my puzzle took me away from how a teacher or principal works to create community on a school landscape and moved me towards understanding the lived experience of children on that landscape. As I attended to the stories of Sadie and Aaron,

two children, I also brought my own stories—I experienced myself living in the "middle of a nested set of stories—[mine] and theirs" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000p. 63).

Each of us—teacher, principal, parent, student—comes to school as a unique individual with multiple storylines embodied in who we are in the moment. We are also seen by each other as teachers, principals, parents, students. How others read and story us also shapes our experience. It is this experience of community, as both phenomenon and method (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), that I wanted to attend to—as lived and told by children on a school landscape.

Dewey (1938) reminded me of the danger of merely thinking about my research as a reaction against others' understandings of community. His ideas encouraged me to form my own understanding through a positive and constructive approach utilizing the principle of continuity of experience in order to give new direction to thinking about community in schools. He made me wonder about the experiences of being in community that lead to educative moments. Consequently, my research was not about community as an abstract or as a place, a way of organizing schools/classrooms, but as a way of understanding experience and looking at the texts of lives.

Re-considering Community as Relationship

I have come to understand community now as a way of interpreting the world alongside others, and less as an organization of place or space. This knowing has continued to be informed and influenced by many authors I continue to read and study, authors such as Clandinin and Connelly (1996; 2000; 1990), Hollingsworth (1994), Paley (2004; 1981; 1990; 1992; 1997; 1999), Greene (1993; 1995), Buber (1958), and Dewey

(1934; 1938). Their work about children, about experience, about lives in school, and about relationship help me reconsider notions of community. These authors continue to fill up many of the between spaces of my conversations.

Arendt's (1958) writing concerning the interactions that lie between people as they weave a "web of human relationships" (p. 183) reminds me that much of what I am interested in is intangible and ephemeral. But this is also essential to understanding life.

The work of Vivian Paley, which also strongly shaped my master's research (Pearce, 1995), continues to remind me that all my wonders stem from a desire to make educative spaces for children. She has shown me how much one can learn from paying attention to children and that their stories should guide the unfolding of community within the classroom. "Only by reaching into the endemic imagery of each child can we proceed together in any mutual enterprise. All else is superficial; we will not have touched one another" (Paley, 1990, p. 12). Like Paley, I do not believe that community can be found outside of oneself. As such, I choose to situate my work alongside her understanding of community as unfolding and not alongside an understanding of community as something that can be built. "None of us are to be found in sets of tasks or lists of attributes; we can be known only in the unfolding of our unique stories within the context of everyday events" (Paley, 1990, p. xii).

Like Huber and Whelan (2000), I am interested in opening up possibilities for imagining community as a multilayered textual story of caring relationships. It is the "still pond" (p. 216) story of community, they believe, that contributes to a sense of silence and isolation. Create a ripple, they seem to suggest, and you will shape experiences for lives and stories to interlap.

Dillard (1998) is also part of many conversations I am having about understanding community and the process of my writing. As I entered my research site, she reminded me that I was entering a story of experience already under way. Just as Dillard remained mindful of all that surrounded her in her writing, I too attempted to let my research "forge its own form" (p. 144) as I "pry[ed] open the landscape" (p. 149) and wrote about the treasures I found; the experiences, relationships, and stories of myself and research participants.

Hollingsworth (1994) informed my understanding of sustained conversation and relational knowing. I come to know, as a result of knowing about myself, about my relationship with others and with the environment in which I live. Hollingsworth encouraged me to open my own knowing to question through my research relationships, to be open to surprises, and to place value on my participants' "lived experiences and emotions as knowledge" (p. 45). Hollingsworth states, "the ideal conversational situations for relational knowing, therefore [are] those that [provide] opportunities for a renewed sense of questioning received wisdom through hermeneutic dialogue—conversation that contains a space for wonder, mystery, uncertainty, and the barely knowable" (p. 79). I continue to think of my work as under constant negotiation and improvisation.

There are many others who fill the "space between" at my table and help me with my wonders—their names fill these pages and it is their research I build upon. There are still others who I imagine are still to come.

I turn my gaze back to Gary now, the boy I met my first year teaching, as I think of my desire to understand my experience of community and the experiences others have

of community. I wonder about the stories Gary might have brought to school with him 20 years ago. Would there have been a community of choice for him in the classroom? How might the stories he lived off the school landscape or in the out-of-classroom space have shaped his in-classroom stories[4]? How might I have attended to his past stories helping weave them into current ones, in turn imagining and re-imagining future possibilities? Remembering the feel of Gary's fists helps me see how his multiple stories bumped up against my monolithic teacher one.

Recollecting my story of Gary reminds me that I have lived and continue to live a life among others. He makes me want to "make face" with other young children, to "discover the unfamiliar shadows, the inner faces" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. xxvii) as a way of honouring him and uncovering new possibilities for being in respectful relationship with others. I wanted to see if there was a possibility for a counterstory (Lindemann Nelson, 1995).

Open Spaces

Shortly before I met Aaron and Sadie, my two research participants, my son completed a puzzle at home. The final picture showed a scene of dinosaurs wandering a rugged, mainly barren landscape. When my daughter took her turn to complete the same puzzle, pieces were joined together quite differently, several spaces were evident, and a very different picture emerged. Looking at these two very different responses to the same puzzle left me with many wonders of my own, wonders around knowledge, around

[4] This work adopts Clandinin and Connelly's (1995) conceptualization of the professional knowledge landscape of schools which recognizes two distinct places, the in- and the out-of-classroom places, which shape stories of experience in schools.

blurring boundaries, around imagination, around relationship, and around perception. The very effort of puzzle making for both of my children was a form of meaning making. Puzzles emerge from experiences and experiences emerge from puzzles. The story of my research is also a form of meaning making for me. It emerged from my experiences, my narrative beginnings, and the finished picture—this dissertation—will reveal a picture of wandering a landscape that will result in more wonders, more puzzles. To different people, my research might tell a different story, reveal a different picture, result in a different interpretation. We all stand at different vantage points from our own lived place in the world. Quite possibly my puzzle could have been reconstructed in multiple ways, filling in some gaps, leaving others open.

When I look back at my children's puzzle, I could choose to understand what happened by seeing small. Seeing in this way I might wonder how the differing ages and developmental levels of my children affected their finished pictures. I might wonder about the additional exposure my son, my older child, might have had to puzzles in general and to dinosaurs in particular. I might wonder about the difference in their attention span, their interests, their fine motor ability, and their ability to persevere with a task, but, having spent many years walking alongside my children, attending to their play, their interactions with people and objects, and their early years in formal and informal education settings, I know that the uniqueness of their puzzles comes out of the uniqueness of their lives. For me, and for Greene (1995), this is a way of seeing big.

Seeing big allows me to see and understand my children in a relational way. This relational way of seeing is our story of community.

Chapter 2

A Walk in the Metaphorical Woods

The children had already changed their home reading books and were participating in Free Exploration when I arrived at the classroom door. Gale joined me in the back area where I moved to drop off my coat and bag… I noticed Andrea [a former university student of mine] had returned to Ravine[5] to do her four-week field experience and was placed in Gale's year one-two classroom. "That's Marni and that's Miss Baxter," Mei told another child sitting near her at the listening centre. "Miss Baxter wants to be a teacher but Marni, she's just, well she's Marni." When I mentioned this later to Gale she told me that a conversation had broken out in the classroom about my name shortly before my arrival. "It was just after Andrea had re-introduced herself to the class as Miss Baxter and explained how she would be spending four weeks with us as a student teacher," Gale told me. "We were talking about an art project we were going to do later in the day when Tanys said, 'Mrs. Marni can help us with that.' 'No, she's just Marni,' Sadie had responded before someone else then asked a question that shifted the conversation back to the upcoming art project." (Field note, November 18, 2002)

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[5] Ravine is a pseudonym for my research site. Ravine Elementary School is an urban school in a western Canadian city. The neighbourhood, as reported by Statistics Canada (1996), is ethnically diverse with the largest ethnic population represented by individuals of European descent followed by individuals of South Asian, Chinese, Southeast Asian, Filipino, and Latin American descent in order of percentage of the community population, with other ethnicities represented. A small percentage of people in the community are of Aboriginal heritage. It is a middle to lower middle class neighbourhood comprised of mostly single family dwellings with an employment rate of 72%. It has many green spaces located adjacent to schools and separate city parks. It is a family community with children 19 years or younger making up 42% of the community population. The immediate area surrounding Ravine has a number of multiple family dwellings including rental apartments and townhouses as well as some housing owned by Aboriginal groups.

The art project in question was a drawing of trees. Just beyond the school boundary were a small wood and a flowing ravine. The children knew they were never to enter the ravine unless it was part of a class outing, but the woods became a site I often visited during my year at Ravine. Sometimes I visited alone but usually with Gale and her students, and it became a way of understanding my research. "Woods are a metaphor for the narrative text" (Eco, 1994, p. 3) and also, in my view, for the narrative life.

Eco (1994) explains that when walking in a wood or spending time with a narrative text, one is forced to make choices all the time. There are multiple turning points, a variety of possible paths to follow. In some ways, it seems that the mysterious depths of the woods are connected to the mysterious unknown depths of a text or a life. What matters is the possibility for discovering something new or for rediscovering something forgotten. Moving through, with a willingness to be playful and wander along, often results in the mapping out of new territory. Eco reminds us that "lingering doesn't mean wasting time" (p. 50) either in a walk or a text. In fact, he says, "It is right … while walking in the wood to use every experience and every discovery to learn about life, about the past and the future" (p. 49).

Dear reader, I invite you then to move within this text as you might move within a wood or within your life. Take time to linger, to wander, to notice, to look again, and to wonder about what you hear, notice, and feel.

Questions of who I was in the classroom surfaced many times throughout my year-long narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Beginning my work in Gale's classroom shaped a new storyline in my life as I negotiated not only what my research would be about but who I would come to walk alongside as my research unfolded.

Listening to Sadie's and Mei's words made me pause and wonder who I was becoming in the stories the children told about their own life in the classroom. They had a story of Gale as Mrs. Hammitt, their classroom teacher. The story they told of Andrea, as Miss Baxter, was of student-teacher, someone who would be part of their classroom for a short while on her own journey of becoming a teacher. They had a story for teacher and for student teacher, but for me—there seemed to be no story for "Marni" yet. It was tensions such as this that helped me stop and attend to the bumping up of my life as researcher with other lives at Ravine Elementary. It also served to remind me of the unfolding and improvisational nature of my story of research as a narrative inquirer. My research would be a metaphorical walk in the woods, allowing opportunity for lingering, for changing paths, and for meeting people along the way.

Entering the Woods

This chapter then is about embarking on a trip through the metaphorical woods of my research. It is not only about how I negotiated the journey but also about my desire to enter into, and see deeply, the world around me. As Geertz (1995) says, "You don't exactly penetrate another culture… You put yourself in its way and it bodies forth and enmeshes you" (p. 44). Maintaining a focus on experience helped my inquiry unfold. It was a willingness to be uncertain about my participants and the paths my research might follow that allowed me to gently but purposefully become enmeshed in the classroom and begin to understand the culture from my own lived perspective.

My knowing as a narrative inquirer is not separate from the experiences of my life. "Viewers are as much a part of the landscape as the boulders they stand on" (Silko,

1996, p. 27). Silko reveals that traditional Pueblo stories often incorporated elements of the land in such a way to allow for the story to serve as a map. She makes me think of my life as a narrative inquirer as being in relation to the lives of others. She also helped me see my research as a journey, in relation not only with my research participants, but also with a school [redacted]. The experience of the people in community is about the interplay between the landscape and stories of those who walk that landscape. Silko helped me imagine possibilities for attending to my life on the landscape and how my presence would shape the nature of what was said, seen, felt, and experienced.

My living alongside Gale, Sadie, and later Aaron and his mother grew out of wonders that began to surface for me as a classroom teacher, initially explored in my master's research (Pearce, 1995). In this early work, I engaged in a narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) alongside four diverse Grade 1 children who were composing their school lives. I wanted to attend to issues around voice, diversity, relationships, understanding experience, and relational inquiry. In my doctoral studies I continued to be interested in further exploring some of these wonders.

Borrowing from the work of Calkins (1991), Jeannette, Ravine's principal, introduced the idea of writers' notebooks to the staff and students at the school. Jeannette hoped that having staff and students write about their lives would encourage them to "pause and make meaning of what was happening around [them]" (Field note, August, 30, 2002). My use of a research notebook, influenced by the work of Clandinin and Connelly (2000) also helped me maintain wakefulness during my time at Ravine as a way of introducing inquiry into classroom and school lives. My notebooks were filled with moments that helped me attend to the experiences of life on the school landscape in a

combined year one-two classroom, and off the school landscape in the multiple, changing homes of one of the young students in the class. The story I now tell is not fixed in time but folds back and forth across time and place, filled with tellings and re-tellings that have allowed my own narratives to intersect with the narratives of others. These pages then are interwoven, much as a writer's notebook, with fragments of memory that allow me to move inward and outward, backward and forward (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), at times feeling lost and uncertain, in order to re-search the experience of my year at Ravine.

Writing Down the Wood

My experiences at Ravine were captured in the stark black and white entries in my research notebook. In revisiting those pages, I realized I had already forgotten some of the details, but it was in those revisitings that the greys began to appear. My understandings shifted as my life shifted, in moving away from living in the field to writing about my experience in the field and my relationships with my participants. Those greys were the places where I began to make sense of all that I saw, all that I experienced and wondered about during my time at Ravine Elementary School, but I am not the only one filling in gaps. In telling the story now of living my research at Ravine, "it cannot say everything about this world. It hints at it and then asks the reader to [also] fill in a whole series of gaps" (Eco, 1994, p. 3). Writing a text and reading the text is a collaborative venture, a walking through the woods together journey.

Rereading my research notebook I understand now that my eyes did not capture all that I witnessed, all that I now recall. At times my pencil recorded hints of things I had

not really attended to at the time, moments and experiences that were written mainly on my body or left to linger in my mind. My notebook became a tentative way of seizing some of those moments before they may have vanished, of fixing those events in my memory in order to later give meaning to my time in the classroom. With my notebook I tried to keep those memories alive and surrounded them with my questions, my wonders, my tensions, my feelings. They were a way for me to hold on to the moments where I was learning to attend relationally to lives. My notebook proves to me that those moments, those people, existed. Revisiting those moments helps me see how my experiences alongside my research participants changed the way I now live on the landscape of schools. As Carol Shields once wrote in a letter to a friend, I believe "we see further and deeper with time" (Thomas, 2003, p. 79). I could not make sense of many of the things I was attending to or was experiencing at the time of my research, but capturing in my notebook what I saw, what I felt, what I experienced, helped me. "I did understand it would pass over me with the force of a river, and that I needed to pin the water to its banks and hold it still, somehow, to give myself time to know it" (Kingsolver, 1995, p. 119). My research notebook helped me hold time still.

My research story is grounded in what I learned during my time at Ravine School, about the lives of two children, one parent, a teacher, and myself as our stories bumped up against one another both in and out of the classroom. What we know is inextricably linked with who we are and these have become our "stories to live by" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 114). These stories to live by, which are multiple and fluid, are composed and recomposed over time, in relationship with others. Stories to live by are what my re-tellings are trying to explore.

I have learned about school, about belonging and becoming in community, from the experiences of my own life, lived in relationship with others who have their own stories of belonging and becoming. I learned this from the moments of my own narrative histories in the ways I could see, hear, do, and feel, as a child, a student, a teacher, a counsellor, a teacher-educator, and a parent, but while living those experiences I seldom stopped to explore them—and besides, they were my seeing and hearing and doing and feeling. Spending time in Gale's classroom at Ravine helped me attend to the experiences of others, to see my story as embedded in the lived stories of others. In revisiting that November morning field note, I began to wonder about the stories to live by that shaped Sadie's naming me as "just Marni."

My story of coming to do my research at Ravine could have many beginning places. I have learned that it requires my patience in the telling and possibly even more from those who listen. Sharing and unpacking this story is essential to understanding the research I began to live out. Since I must begin somewhere, I begin on a sunny June morning with a glass of iced tea.

> We shared a glass of raspberry iced tea at her kitchen table. "I love visiting with friends in my kitchen," Gale told me. We began our conversation talking about friends we had in common and soon I ventured to ask Gale about her early teaching experiences… Don, Gale's husband, was home too—he had noticed my dirty van when I drove up and when I was talking to Gale in the kitchen he surprised me by giving it a wash. "I was doing my own and just kept on going," he said later. I liked him instantly…By the time Gale and I moved to the living room with our second glass of iced tea, we were both sitting with our feet curled

up on the cushions beneath us and it was my turn to talk about my research. "I don't think I'm very articulate about my wonder yet," I told her, but Gale seemed to understand nevertheless. She talked about her own return to graduate work this past year and how she had thought she would be studying more about children and literacy. "I've ended up learning way more about myself as a teacher than about the kids I am teaching," she said. When Gale asked me more about my own research I felt quite tentative as I outlined my idea of spending two or three mornings a week throughout the school year walking alongside a few children in her classroom. I tried to talk about the notion of being an observant participant and how I wished to attend to stories of belonging, becoming, and community. I spoke a lot about wanting to know what happens when the lives of children, teachers, and parents meet on the landscape of school—and also what happens when these stories bump up against one another. "I want to attend to those places and spaces," I told her. "I'm just not sure yet how that might look… I wonder if community is something that is created or something that unfolds over time," I wondered out loud. Gale's whole body seemed to lift away from her chair as she stretched her body closer to mine. "I understand," she said. "Maybe your wonder is a lot like community—something that will evolve over time." "Yes," I responded and smiled. (Interim research text, based on field note, June 12, 2002)

A Wood Between the Worlds

Gale was excited at the thought of her classroom being the site for my doctoral research. She wanted to continue some of the conversations that had begun for her during

her time at university, some of which occurred around the Centre table. At first Gale was hesitant about her return to Ravine after her year-long sabbatical. "I've always had a teaching partner until very recently… I can't believe I've taught for over 20 years already—and never had a desire to leave the younger grades," she told me as we sipped our iced tea (Field note, June 12, 2002). Yet I could tell during our June conversation that the thought of returning to Ravine was troubling her somewhat. It seemed that things started to change for her when her teaching partner moved schools shortly before Gale's return to university. Gale had hoped to transfer schools as well—"I was eager for a change" (Field note, June 12, 2002)—but she was reassigned to Ravine after her year at university. "I have this sense of loyalty to Jeanette [the school principal], though," she said, "but I'm worried about returning… I'm not the same teacher I was when I left. In fact, I'm not sure who I really am anymore. I just know that I want to continue to explore that question around my teaching identity" (Field note, June 12, 2002).

Knowing that my own research wonders were based on an interest in experience (Dewey, 1938) and narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), I realized I needed a teacher and a school that would be open to the emergent and relational way I wanted to situate myself as a researcher. Knowing also that Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly had framed a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) study proposal around questions of how the diverse lives of teachers, children, families, and administrators meet in schools, I was interested in situating my work within this larger project. This larger project was situated at Ravine and all of this led me to Gale and to the school.

Like Jean Clandinin, my doctoral supervisor, I had prior experience with Gale, with Jeanette, and with Ravine Elementary School. Jean and I had participated in an alternative teacher education project at the school and I had also worked with Jeanette, Ravine's principal, and another colleague from the Centre in the delivery of a first-year teacher education course on site at Ravine. I knew the school and many of its staff members as being open to a fluid, shifting, and at times, possibly tension-filled inquiry.

> Jeanette invited us to participate in the two staff development days that opened the school year. Although we had all visited the school on numerous occasions last spring to talk with teachers about our research, I couldn't help but wonder what their thoughts were as we sat amongst them as they prepared to begin a new year. How might we shape the stories that would be lived out at the school? That first day we mainly listened as Jeanette read a story and spoke to the staff about the importance of voice, vision, and relational stories in the coming year. On the second morning Jean was invited to share a few words about how we imagined our research to be lived out at the school. "We want to understand the stories parents and children, as well as teachers, tell us about their lives in school," she said, "and how these stories sometimes bump up against one another." She spoke also about situating our work as researchers as studies "with and alongside" others rather than as studies "on" others. As I looked around the group while Jean was talking everyone seemed so attentive to her words. It seemed like a space was opening up for us to wonder and learn together. (Interim research text, based on field note, August 30, 2002)

Two other doctoral students from the Centre, Shaun Murphy and Anne Murray Orr, had also decided to nest their research within the larger SSHRC study, and we shared many conversations about who we might be at Ravine and how our research might be lived out. Having Jean, Shaun, and Anne beside me during those first few days at the school gave me a sense of strength in the face of my vulnerability at beginning something new. Jean's words helped shape an understanding of how the inquiry might unfold at Ravine. She seemed to be saying to all of us that the work would be messy, improvisational, and emergent. Situating our work as research *with* rather than as research *on* identified it as a relational form of inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

Ravine is an elementary school filled with complex interactions, shifting boundaries, and unfolding relationships. When I began my research there, I saw myself entering a *wood between the worlds* place (Lewis, 1955).

In the first book of the Narnia series, *The Magician's Nephew* (1955), C. S. Lewis describes the wood between the worlds as a peaceful, gently sunlit place where a traveller could choose to enter various worlds. "It was the quietest wood you could possibly imagine … You could almost feel the trees growing" (p. 32). Throughout the wood are numerous pools. Characters who jump into one of these while wearing a particular and very special magic ring come out in one of countless worlds. This gateway leads to many different worlds, one not yet even created. The main character, Digory, compares the wood to the tunnel under the slates at his home; the tunnel allows entry into any of the houses in the row. The tunnel and the wood between the worlds are similar to the attic that spans all the houses along his block. It, too, connects many places with one room. Digory's stepping into a pool to travel to a world is much like opening an attic door

without knowing what is on the other side. As readers, we are invited to enter Narnia, a land soon to be populated with a rich diversity of beings. As we participate in the awakening of Narnia, the story encourages us to attend to how imagination and improvisation can be used to draw us into multiple realities.

Sitting in the opening staff meeting, feeling connected to my research colleagues, to Jeanette and to Gale, I wondered what I would be stepping into as I prepared to enter Gale's classroom on the first day of school. Jeanette gave each one of us a pewter book mark to remind us that "our lives are stories" and "we need to share our stories" with one another and respect and "listen to the stories of the children" in our classrooms (Field note, August 29, 2002). I imagined Gale's classroom as a storied landscape filled with a rich diversity of beings (Lewis, 1955). I imagined awakening to the story of my research as I began to make connections with the children who would become my research participants.

In putting pen to paper for field notes those early days I saw myself beginning to invent the field (Ely *et al.*, 1997), creating and recreating experience. I was mindful of Dewey's (1938) caution that "attentive care must be devoted to the conditions which give each present experience a worthwhile meaning" (p. 49). As a result, my field notes included not only direct quotes, but observations, descriptive accounts, wonders that were called forth, and emotions I was experiencing.

Encountering Others in the Wood

"We have a new friend in the classroom that will be joining us every now and then in our classroom this year," Gale told the children as they gathered on the

> carpet area at the back of the room. I was then invited to introduce myself to the children. Hesitantly, I began to tell the children a little bit about myself. How, like them, I was a student, but one who attended university and how I was interested in the stories children told about their life in schools. I had been a teacher, I shared, spending most of my time with Grade 1 students. I talked also of my own two children, Liam just beginning Grade 2, and Joanna just entering pre-school. When someone asked my name, I suggested they could call me Marni. Gale told the children that they should view me as "another teacher… somebody who you could go to for help when she is in our room." Gale then carried on with the morning calendar activities … I was left feeling a little uncomfortable with being positioned as another teacher in the room. (Field note, September 4, 2002)

Even though, as an elementary school teacher for many years, I had participated in countless circle time conversations with children, I experienced a depth of "not-knowing" (Vinz, 1997, p. 138) when I first sat in a similar conversation space in Gale's classroom. How was I to reveal myself to these children? Vinz describes this way of coming to more deeply know ourselves as "acknowledg[ing] ambiguity and uncertainty…. To *not-know*…is to admit vulnerability" (p. 139). Vinz encourages me, as a researcher who has also been a teacher, to embrace not-knowing as an important way to continue to grow and learn about who I was and who I was becoming. There was the sense of possibility to be found in this vulnerability.

Like Bruner (2002), I believe "we constantly construct and reconstruct our selves to meet the needs of the situations we encounter, and we do so with the guidance of our memories of the past and of our hopes and fears for the future" (p. 64). As I began,

naming myself as Marni, as someone interested in their lives, I was trying to position myself as living alongside the children. I was giving them a part of my story, a story that included glimpses of my life. I was Marni, mother of Liam and Joanna. I was a student who had been a teacher with classrooms of her own. I was interested in hearing stories of children's lives in schools. However, positioning myself as researcher in a classroom, my story was also shaped by the boundaries and established traditions of how it meant for adults to live their lives in schools. I understood when Gale fell back into the script with which she was most comfortable, naming me as another teacher. This was safer ground, a more dependable story of who I was and might be in the classroom. However, I felt uncomfortable at this singular naming, pulled back into a narrow view of positioning myself in the classroom. I wanted to explore a more textured way of knowing and becoming known to the children. I wanted to distract the children from storying me as a teacher. In naming myself Marni and not Ms. Pearce, I was asking them to engage in an act of forgetfulness (Greene, 1995) with me and to imagine a new story of who I might be in their classroom, a story of multiplicity. Nelson (1995) helps me see how I was trying to live out a counterstory. This was a story that Gale became more comfortable with over time.

In this early field note I also began to see glimpses of Gale's personal practical knowledge (Clandinin, 1985) at play. I learned that Gale liked to gather with her children each morning to tell stories, to talk about their day, and to learn from one another. I learned that she was interested in sharing some authority with her students, each day identifying a student as a teacher's assistant who would help with the morning routine. Inviting me into this space was Gale's way of welcoming me into the life and rhythm of

the classroom. Naming me first as teacher was another expression of Gale's personal practical knowledge.

This early field note also illustrates the three-dimensional nature of my research. One dimension of this metaphorical inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) is the notion of place where the inquiry occurred. The meeting area was a physical space in Gale's classroom, a shared space on the landscape. There were other places where I came to know the stories being lived out but it was the common area of the meeting place where the children and I first encountered each other. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) identify past, present, and future as the terms for the second dimension of the three-dimensional inquiry space. My field note alludes to a sense of moving backward and forward in time as I examine questions around who I am and am becoming within the context of the classroom. It was impossible to name myself only as teacher. That was a part of who I brought to the classroom meeting space, but it was not the only way I wanted to understand myself in that space. These feelings also draw attention to the third dimension of the inquiry space, the personal and social, and the relational aspect of my work. While my field note describes the outward conditions of this moment in the classroom, claiming an identity for myself, it also demonstrates my research as drawing me inward to my "feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions" (p. 50).

Composing Field Texts While Living in the Wood

Each day I entered the landscape of the classroom was a beginning place. As Jeanette suggested, it was a place of story, a place of life stories. I began the year spending two to three mornings per week in Gale's combined year one-two classroom as

an observant participant (Florio-Ruane, 2001). Early in September I had an opportunity to meet the families of the children in the classroom and speak to them about my research. The primary team had organized a parent evening to share information about their program. The meeting began in the library with a sharing of coffee and doughnuts. Gale told me later that she was disappointed that relatively few of the parents from her room had attended. Although the teachers left baskets of paper and pencils on the tables for parents to jot down any questions during the presentation, the paper remained blank, the pencils untouched. After the more formal group presentation around issues of philosophy, home-school collaboration, expectations, and curriculum, the parents were invited to spend a few moments in their child's classroom, together with their child's teacher.

> Immediately I noticed how pockets of conversation began to break out when parents began to leave the library and enter their child's classroom. Several of Gale's parents commented about their child's desk having been moved since their last time visiting their classroom. I sensed, through their raised eyebrows and their silent glances at one another and at Gale, that they wondered about the reason behind the moves. There seemed to be the unspoken question, "Did my child do something wrong?"
>
> As parents took their seats in or around their children's desks, Gale invited me to say a few words about my role in the classroom this year. I spoke first from my place of mother, of my son just beginning Grade 2 and of my daughter who would soon be entering pre-school. I wanted somehow to situate myself alongside the parents, letting them know that I experienced classroom life not only as a teacher and researcher, but also as a parent.... I spoke briefly about my role as a

> graduate student and part of a group of researchers spending time at Ravine this year. I talked about my interest in spending time alongside a few children, and possibly their parents, trying to understand more about life in schools… I told how a letter about my research would soon be sent home and I might be talking to one or two of the parents about the possibility of engaging more closely in a research relationship with their child… There were no questions when I finished and then Gale got up to speak. (Field note, September 9, 2002)

I include this field note not only to tell a story of how I introduced my research and my tentative role in the classroom to the parent community, but also to illustrate again how field notes were a form of research data, what Clandinin and Connelly (2000) call field texts, for me, enabling me to have a growing understanding of life in and around the classroom. I include it also because Aaron's and Sadie's parents were not present at the meeting. It was only in revisiting the field note that this became known to me. My introduction to the parents followed a similar path to when I first met the children. I was Marni, mother of Liam and Joanna, a parent with school-aged children like all of them. I was also Marni, a doctoral student with several years of teaching experience. While I did not emphasize my teaching experience with the children, I did so with their parents. Why? I wonder if it was to make me feel less vulnerable in their presence, to try to claim a rightful place in the classroom, to give the parents a sense of security in this stranger visiting their child's classroom, to say I belonged. There were no questions when I finished speaking. When I took my seat, I felt as if I had spoken *to* the parents and not *with* them. I knew this needed to change, but knew also that I was a little afraid. In my research notebook later that evening I wrote, "I know I need to find ways to speak to and

to listen to what matters to the parents and their children" (Field note, September 9, 2002). I knew I needed to become what Behar (1996) calls a vulnerable observer. When I re-read my notebook, I realize I have embedded "a diary of my life within the accounts of the lives of others" (p. 19). Behar tells me that only by making myself vulnerable will I come to know the story of others as I also come to know my own story.

Over the next several weeks I participated in classroom activities, attended school assemblies and special school-wide events, and became more comfortable both on the in-classroom and out-of-classroom spaces on the school landscape. Responding to life in the classroom I began to participate more fully by working with individual or small groups of children, assisting Gale with planning or material preparation, helping with recess supervision, spending time in conversation with parents who were coming to pick up/drop off their children or were volunteering in the room, attending field trips, and developing relationships with the children. Eventually I began to notice that my field notes were filling up with stories and wonders around two particular children in the classroom, Sadie and Aaron.

Meeting I and Thou in the woods.

While consent forms around my research had gone home to all of the families in Gale's classroom asking permission to participate and write field notes of classroom life, I began to engage more closely in a relational form of inquiry with Sadie and Aaron. Although both Sadie's and Aaron's mothers signed and returned consent forms, I wondered if they might also be willing to spend time in conversation with me around their children's school experiences. I hoped it would allow me to more fully travel to my

participants' worlds (Lugones, 1987) and bring new clarity to how I understood Sadie's and Aaron's experiences of community on the school landscape. While Karen, Aaron's mother, became an important part of my unfolding research, I was able to connect with Sadie's mother only once.

As the research continued to unfold, I collected artifacts and engaged in a series of unstructured, open-ended conversations with Gale, Sadie, Aaron, and Aaron's mother. Most of these conversations were tape-recorded, transcribed, and, at times, reviewed with the participants for further elaboration, clarification, or continuing conversation.

With these research relationships came a great responsibility and the need to be guided by an ethic of caring (Noddings, 1984) and a fidelity to persons (Noddings, 1986). Noddings argues that care should be a foundation for ethical decision making. Fidelity from an ethic of caring is "a direct response to individuals with whom one is in relation" (1986, p. 497). Noddings (1984) suggests approaching an understanding of ethics from a feminine approach "rooted in receptivity, relatedness, and responsiveness" (p. 2). Further, Noddings believes caring involves a connection between the carer and the cared for. She identifies this as a form of reciprocity; that is, that both the carer and the cared-for contribute to and learn and gain from the relationship. Thus, she reminds me, a caring relationship involves fidelity, trust, dialogue, and continuity.

The work of Hollingsworth (1994) suggests that conversations reflect such features as caring, sharing, acknowledging, trust, and continuity. As Hollingsworth writes, "Conversation both as a means of learning and support for learning is not new. It finds support…in recent theoretical work which suggests that personally meaningful knowledge is socially constructed through shared understanding" (p. 6). I wanted my

research space to be a place of sustained conversation and to afford what Schroeder (1996) identifies as a "middle space." Schroeder writes of research as relationship that is intentionally created, transformational, mutually shaped, shifting, unbounded, and multi-layered.

By thinking about my research as an opportunity to engage fully with my participants, I understood it also as a meeting between *I and Thou* (Buber, 1958). This meeting is what Buber (as cited in Hobes, 1972) called "the sphere of the between" (p. 72), something that occurs on the *narrow ridge* (Friedman, 1993) of engaged relationships. He sees the fundamental means of doing this as genuine dialogue. The life of dialogue involves "the turning towards the other" (Buber, 1947, p. 22), found not by seeking, but by grace. To do this also involves a relationship rooted in care theory.

With my participants I wanted to develop relationships that were authentic (Rousseau, 1991). Authenticity is a way of being in relationship that called me to be honest, respectful, genuine, and caring. Acting as a connected knower (Belenky *et al.*, 1986) encouraged a collaborative approach stemming from an interest in learning from the experience of my participants and myself. "Connected knowers begin with an interest in the facts of other people's lives, but they gradually shift the focus to other people's ways of thinking" (p. 115). Connected knowing is also characterized by caring, empathy, careful listening, collaboration, and playing what Elbow (1973) refers to as the believing game. The believing game allowed me to walk alongside my research participants more intimately, to "try to have [their] experience of meaning" (p. 165).

I worked to develop responsive and caring relationships on a narrow ridge with my participants so as to understand their experience of who we were and who we were becoming as we negotiated our way in a classroom and school community.

Forms of Field Texts.

Narrative was both the "phenomena under study *and* method of study" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 4). Narrative names the quality of experience studied and also the pattern of inquiry into my research. Not only did I live the narrative in relation with my research participants, I also tell the story of our narrative lives.

> The weather has turned colder. Gale and I had been talking for a few weeks about having the children create an identity collage. I was interested what pictures the children might choose to tell about themselves. How might they experience these collages as a "Me-in-Progress"? What stories might they share of themselves when making and sharing their collages? Gale had created her own identity collage to share with the children as a way of getting them thinking about the activity. Gale had included a picture from a magazine of a man fly-fishing. She spoke about how she and her husband love to go camping and how it was her job to identify the flies in the different areas, based on her love of wildflowers. The children were drawn into this picture and began to tell many of their own camping or hiking stories. Many had a hard time wondering about the place of flies in fishing. I wondered what sorts of stories they were beginning to tell themselves of their teacher based on her identity collage.

> The children were invited to select a piece of construction paper for their own collage. After asking my favourite colour, Sadie chose blue. Magazines were handed out and the children quickly became absorbed by the pictures. Several got lost in flipping through the pages and seemed to forget the task of selecting pictures for their collages. Although many of the children tried to find pictures that spoke about them, their interests, their families ("I need a picture with lots of pets," said Shane), others simply looked for pictures they liked. Yet these pictures too helped create a sense of who these children were and were becoming. (Interim research text, based on field note, January 9, 2003)

This field note illustrates a subtle shift from my role as observant-participant (Florio-Ruane, 2001) to that of participant contributor (Goldstein, 1997). By asking Gale to consider collage as a form of identity meaning making with the children I was beginning to share some responsibility for the life of the classroom. From conversations and readings shared with colleagues around the Centre table I understood the process of making a collage as a reflexive, interpretive art activity (Finley, 2001). In suggesting collage as a class activity I hoped there would be ample time for discussion, inquiry, and reflection through the act of choosing pictures and layering them to make a story of one's life. I thought the visual information in the collages would allow for an alternative way for children to share their stories of who they were and who they were becoming. The one making the collage could not be separated from the collage itself. I wondered what might be concealed as well as revealed. Not only was I present as the children composed their identity collages, I also engaged them in small group conversations around their

completed pieces. While Sadie was present for these activities, this was a time during the school year when Aaron had been absent for some time.

Photographs were another form of field text that informed my research. Interested in how Sadie would story her classroom life using photographs, I gave her a one-time disposable camera and asked her to "take photos of things that matter[ed]" to her (Transcript of conversation, February 4, 2003). I hoped that the photographs would allow me to slow down the moments of Sadie's life in school in order to better attend to them. After the photographs were developed I engaged in a conversation with Sadie about her purposes for taking them and how they connected to her life in the classroom.

Aaron was also given a one-time camera but as he was not formally in school at this time he was asked instead to "take pictures of things that are important in your life… things that you would be willing to talk with me about later" (Field note, February 4, 2003).

As part of a unit on families, Gale had invited the children to contribute a photo album page to a class album (Field note, February 18, 2003). This had been assigned as a homework activity to allow family members to work together to select and share sample photographs that illustrated their child's life outside of school.

> Next it was Sadie's turn to share her photographs. One photo was of her family having a spaghetti dinner. "See my party hat? It's my 5th birthday!" she told us.… Several of Sadie's photos showed her with her two older brothers. Each picture showed her in the middle. She was so proud pointing out her brothers, every time making sure to say how they were her "big" brothers. (Field note, February 26, 2003)

Photographs gave the children another form for expressing their knowing, their place in the world. They mark a particular time, place, or event around which a story can be told or retold. Images, created with photographs, provide useful insights into an individual's experience (Bach, 1998).

Another, less successful, means of field text was the use of a dialogue journal with Aaron. This was an idea that originated from Aaron.

> Aaron was waiting for me when I hung up the phone. He was holding one of the new notebooks he had brought from home. "It's you and me," he said. Aaron had drawn a picture of the two of us walking on the sidewalk in front of his house. "Mrne and me," he had written. "Mrne is kid uv like my mom." Speechless, I knelt down to give him a hug, when he presented me with a similar notebook. On the cover he had written, "Fram Aaron. To mrne" and told me that I could use this book to write back to him. Wow…. (Field note, February 20, 2003)

I did write back to Aaron and he kept this notebook in his classroom desk. He pulled it out again, later that same day, and asked me to "write some more. I like to read what you say" (Field note, February 20, 2003). The notebook was taken out every time I visited the classroom after that, whenever Aaron was also present.

> Later in the classroom Aaron commented on the notebook I was carrying. "Why do you always carry that book around?" he asked. "I like to make notes of things I see and hear and think because it helps me remember and pay attention more closely," I responded. Aaron then pulled out the dialogue journal we had been keeping together and showed me how he had created a schedule for our writing. He had drawn a rough graph with our names ("Mrne, Aaron, Mrne, Aaron")

separated by lines. "This is how we can keep track of whose turn it is to write," he told me. (Field note, March 6, 2003)

But Aaron soon left the classroom for an extended period of time. When I went to visit him at home I brought the notebook with me. I had written in it again, this time asking if maybe he would consider writing or drawing about his life outside of school so we could remember to talk about some of these experiences whenever I was able to visit him. Although Aaron liked to draw he was a reluctant writer, and the journal was soon lost. What remained from that endeavour, though, was an ongoing commitment to the relationship, a desire to stay in conversation.

Making Meaning of My Time in the Woods

From my time at the Centre, I had experience with both a weekly research issues group and ongoing works-in-progress groups. In these spaces, what Belenky, Bond, and Weinstock (1997) might refer to as a public homeplace, my thinking and my writing was deeply relational and rooted in an ethic of caring. I brought this knowing forward as I moved from composing field texts to writing interim research texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Creating interim texts allowed me to begin to step back from the field, helping create a transition place between my field texts and my research texts. Writing two forms of interim texts provided new ways of looking at my research material, which led to new insights and understandings.

The relationships I developed with my participants remained at the centre of my work with my interim research texts. These relationships made me think about how I might attend to the form of my writing. How could I present the narratives of experience

in ways that would give voice to my participants' stories, to my stories, and to the stories of the readers of this dissertation? What "angle of repose" (Richardson, 2000, p. 934) could I bring to my work? Richardson (2000) uses the metaphor of the crystal, which helped me see how my writing needed to be shaped so meaning may be refracted for and from the reader, creating a space that moves across and within the three-dimensional inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). "Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities and refract within themselves, creating different colours, patterns, arrays, casting off in different directions. What we see depends upon our angle of repose" (Richardson, 2000, p. 934). Having a crystallized understanding of experience requires looking at it from all directions, from all angles of repose, suggesting a possibility of multiple interpretations.

Ely, Vinz, Downing, and Anzul (1997) encouraged me, as an ongoing learner of qualitative research in general, and narrative inquiry in particular, to evoke the complexity of my research puzzle through an aesthetic, emotional, and experiential way of writing. In their book, *On Writing Qualitative Research: Living By Words* (1997), they tell how they require the reader to "join into [their] thinking, consider a variety of lenses on research writing, ponder about where and how you stand, allow your emotions/mind full sway as you enter into the sometimes heartwrenching, sometimes humorous, and [they] hope always pertinent bits about other people's research… and take some chances" (p. 6).

As I read, re-read, and re-examined my field texts, I began to play with the idea of an angle of repose and of taking chances. I wanted to find a way to continue to pay attention to the moments in my research where I felt a sense of tension, a sense of

awakening to the places where stories bumped up against one another. It was these moments that I wanted to continue to linger over.

O'Connor (1971) made me comfortable with thinking about my interim research texts as a way of helping move my dissertation forward. She says, "I have to write to discover what I am doing. I don't know as well what I think until I see what I say; then I have to say it over again" (p. ix). My supervisor, Jean, also continually invited me to say more as she made notes in the margins of my draft pages. It was the saying more that required me to dig deeper, to expand my thinking, to be more reflective, and that eventually assisted in coming to my knowing.

As a result of returning to full-time work after my year living alongside Gale, Aaron, and Sadie, I worried that some of these moments of tension might lessen for me if I did not find a way to keep them close. In this way I chose to recreate my time in the field by composing two forms of interim research texts. The first was a form of retelling my year alongside my participants in narrative form. This narrative was a weaving of my field notes, the told stories, the lived/silent stories, my embodied knowing, and the transcripts, into one long retelling of my year. The narratives that took place during particular moments and events were captured in the field notes, transcripts, artifacts, and photographs, but it was the weaving of all of this field text into a second retelling that allowed me to revisit the events from a new place and time. Although this first form of interim text was close in form to my original field texts, it also allowed me to see my participants, myself, and my research data as being in relationship. However, "it is important, also, to note that interpretation begins at the moment an event is selected as a source of data, when the narrative is created or an event deemed significant enough to

recount and revisit and revise" (Hankins, 2003, p. 8). It is some of these second tellings, these interim research texts, what Polkinghorne (1988) refers to as an interpretive turn, that are found on these pages.

Each layered piece, each narrative of experience, depends on others that come before and after to assist with understanding patterns and making meaning from the whole. There is no one perspective, no one telling of the research story. Instead, as I think about individual experiences of being in a community, my understanding stems from my belief in multiple tellings, multiple perspectives, multiple voices—truth and knowledge are multiple rather than monolithic.

Another form of interim research text is what I have come to name narrative verse. Borrowing on the free verse tradition of Hesse (2001) and Creech (2001), I was interested in distilling the events of my research experiences, its textures and rhythms and power, into a form that falls between prose and poetry. Unlike found poetry (Butler-Kisber, 1988; Richardson, 2000), my narrative verse was not composed entirely from words found in my field texts. Rather, it evolved from and was informed by those texts, but it was also cut up, partial, and reworked in hopes of creating an immediately recognizable world, a world of my research but also set somewhat apart, again with an interpretive turn. These narrative verses were shared, hesitantly and with some trepidation, with my research participants, who, in turn, resonated with the accounts. "It's not, um, like a real, like a regular story... It's more like… kind of, my thinking… yeah," Sadie told me when I shared the narrative verse I had written with her story, her voice in mind (Field note, July 10, 2003). Some of this narrative verse is found in chapter 4 of this dissertation in order to give the reader another way into my life inside and outside a

school and the people that were a part of it. My goal was to retell the lived experience of my participants while making that world accessible to the reader. The narrative verse shows the reader how it is to live, to feel, to think something. The body feels poetry, even if the mind resists (Richardson, 2000).

Out of the Woods: Composing Research Texts

By being part of my research, Gale, Sadie, Aaron, and Karen, Aaron's mother, allowed me to attend to their experiences, but it was by spending time telling and retelling those experiences to my research community that the stories moved into an inquiry.

While my research puzzle was first unfolding at the Centre table, I often shared how the table was becoming a metaphor for my thinking of community. As I wrote my narrative beginnings, I asked permission to use the table as a place of returning for me in my writings. In taking my interim research texts back to my participants, I tried to take the same care with the stories that, to some extent, had been mutually constructed with my participants. My interim research texts were written to afford me an opportunity to respect the need to pay attention to my own voice as it existed alongside the voice and signature of my participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). "We cannot, however, write from inside the heads of anyone but ourselves… and maybe that's why [I] experiment[ed] so much with [my] writing" (Richardson, 1997, p. 67).

Issues around representation became apparent as I began to create my final research text. What to include? What to leave out? What to place where? In pausing to trouble through these wonders I chose to create a multi-vocal, multi-perspective text in

order to show the narrative inquiry process as an authentic process of living, telling, retelling, and reliving. I felt that multiple forms of representation were needed to show the ways that the life stories of myself and my participants were temporal, shifting, changing, and relational. And so this final research text contains fragments of my field notes, transcripts, and interim research texts and reflects my own search for exploring understandings of community experience.

I sat many hours at my computer, staring into the space left between my computer screen and my interim research texts. I looked and re-looked at the pages of my texts hoping to discover the magic thread that would allow me to pull the pieces together, the path that would move me through the woods. I was searching for the connections between and amongst the stories of experience. In moving forward, I circled back and stopped to linger. In the moments of going forward I also left behind other possibilities, but in walking through the woods, I laid down my own path that mapped out what I was figuring out about this work. My story, my journey, is enfolded within these pages.

A Guided Walk through the Woods: Reading the Research Text

In his book, *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*, Eco (1994) writes, "in a story there is always a reader" (p. 1). In discussing the connection between the reader and the writer, he suggests how a writer leaves clues that invite the reader to explore the work from a certain perspective and to become enclosed in the work. It is from Eco that I borrow the metaphor of a walk through the woods for the telling and retelling of my research journey. As you read this text you will see my wanderings, my noticings, my lingerings, my narrative turns. What was important to me in the writing of this text was that the

experiences of my participants be seen in a holistic way. Yet, Eco helps me understand that in sharing a story "that comprises myriad events and characters, it cannot say everything…It hints at it and then asks the reader to fill in a whole series of gaps" (p. 3).

In the following chapter I introduce Ravine Elementary School, the woods of my research site. Moments of my time at Ravine are shared in order to provide a context for the lives I came to walk alongside. These moments speak to school stories composed by staff, students, and families, and also to stories of school composed by others about what Ravine Elementary School was all about (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996). It is these stories that structured the narratives lived and told.

Chapter 4 sets out each participant's story in the form of narrative verse. This form allows for the reader to understand the story through multiple "angles of repose" (Richardson, 2000). What will the reader deem important? What moments will she or he connect to? What will the reading call forth from the reader's own experiences? The use of narrative verse in this chapter affords the reader a sense of "world-travelling" (Lugones, 1987), of moving between several frames of reference, of entering into the life experiences of my participants, from within their worlds.

In chapters 5 and 6, I attend closely to the unfolding and shifting stories of the two children who became my research participants. As I enter into a deeply caring relationship with Aaron and Sadie, two young students in Gale Hammitt's year one-two classroom at Ravine, I tell and inquire into their stories of experience. Engaging with their narratives I come to understand community in multiple ways, as a process that is unfolding, shifting, relational, and complex.

In chapter 7, I return to Ravine Elementary School and reflect on the moments captured in chapter 3. By returning to these moments, and reflecting on the multi-layered, shifting stories in the moments, I begin to open up possibilities for imagining new storylines in schools; storylines that attend to the importance of relational knowing (Hollingsworth, 1994).

Chapter 8 illustrates how I try to move towards a state of wide-awakeness (Greene, 1995) into new experiences I am living.

Understanding experience narratively draws attention to community as a landscape of possibility that lies between and across the stories diverse people live on diverse landscapes.

Chapter 3

A Story of Ravine Elementary School: A Place to Belong

Shortly before I began my year-long narrative inquiry at Ravine Elementary School I came across a children's picture book that helped me begin to attend to how I might understand my year in the one-two classroom that was to become my research home.

Written in the first person, somewhat as a journal, *The Collector of Moments* by Quint Buchholz and translated by Peter Neumeyer (1999) is a story of a solitary young boy and his upstairs neighbour, an artist named Max. Max's stay is temporary but his impact on the young boy is long lasting. "At dusk, when he couldn't draw anymore, Max used to sing… His songs were wordless. I'd snuggle into the cozy red easy chair and listen," reads the story. The young boy loves to spend afternoons in Max's apartment, reading, dreaming, and playing his violin as the artist paints.

"I used to love to watch Max from my red easy chair, even though I could not see what it was he was drawing. He was secretive about his pictures." The paintings, once completed, always faced the wall.

"One invisible and unique path leads into every picture," Max once tells his young friend, "and the artist has to find just that one path. He can't show the picture too soon, or he might lose that path forever."

Max would often leave on long voyages and, at times, would relate curious tales and events of these travels to the young boy. He told tales of snow elephants in Canada and of flying circus wagons in France. The young boy says, "I liked these stories. They

sounded so implausible and yet Max recounted them as though he really had seen all these things. Of course I always wanted him to tell me the truth."

Then one day Max ventures off on yet another journey and asks the young boy to care for his apartment during his absence. Upon entering the apartment, the young boy discovers that the paintings have now been turned outward, creating a private exhibition for him. I think of Max's paintings as a form of field text (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), which capture the curious things from his travels. Like field texts, the paintings tell us what Max has noticed and, in some cases, not noticed. Each of the paintings has a mysterious caption written by Max, snippets of conversations that had been shared on earlier visits. The images are challenging and invite contemplation. "Slowly it began to dawn on me why I was to look at the pictures while Max was away. He had not wanted to be present to have to give me explanations," says the young boy. "The answers to all my questions," he continues to think to himself, "were revealed in the long spells, which I spent in front of the pictures."

"Max always captured a precise moment. *But I understood that there was always a story attached to this moment which had begun long before and would continue long afterward* [italics added]." In trying to explain his work, Max shared with the young boy: "Every picture has a secret to keep. Even from me. Others might actually discover much more in my pictures than I do… I'm merely the collector. I collect moments."

I share fragments of this book to frame what I want to say about my research site, Ravine Elementary School. Like Max, I collected moments. My moments at Ravine speak of stories that drew me in to the life of the school, moments I paused to attend to, moments over which I experienced some tension. I chose these moments to say

something about the complexity of life at Ravine. It is this complexity I return to in later chapters.

Ravine Stories, Stories of Ravine

Clandinin and Connelly (1996) wrote that when we enter a school landscape, we enter into a place of story. They describe school stories as the ongoing stories composed by teachers, children, families, administrators, and others as they live their lives in school. Stories of school are the stories composed by others and told to others about what the school is about.

When I entered Ravine Elementary as a researcher, I came with my own stories, based on my own narrative history of life in schools and prior experiences at Ravine. I also came with a puzzle. What does community mean in the context of a school and classroom landscape and what are the lived experiences of members of the community? I begin here with my own collection of moments at Ravine, moments captured from my field texts that drew me in and invited contemplation. Some of these moments are school stories, moments composed as I spent time participating in daily life at the school, walking alongside staff, students, and family members. Other moments hint at stories told of Ravine, stories that speak of familiar plotlines around curriculum, attendance, achievement, and parental involvement. My moments are not captured in colourful paintings but in the stark black and white entries in my research notebook. The field texts then are what I used to create these research texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). They tell the context for what I attended to during my time at Ravine Elementary and help pull me back into my experiences at the school. In sharing these moments I compose a

narrative thread that connects the story of Ravine to the story of my research. I pick up on these moments and some of their inherent tensions in later chapters.

First moment: Entering in the midst of stories.

> Having spent time at Ravine in the past makes me feel a part of the stories that continue to unfold around me. There is comfort in coming back here—a place I know filled with people that are open to wondering about kids, about curriculum, about life in schools… (Field note, August 29, 2002)

How do I understand the stories of Ravine? Richardson (1997) suggests that "the story of a life is less than the actual life, because the story told is selective, partial, contextually constructed, and because the life is not yet over" (p. 6). While Richardson refers to a person in her writing, I play with this notion of stories told of my time at Ravine Elementary School as "selective, partial, [and] contextually constructed" (Richardson, 1997, p. 6). I entered Ravine in the beginning of a new school year but in the midst of a "nested set of stories" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 63). The school was about twenty years old, Jeanette was just beginning her sixth year as principal. I entered the school landscape filled with the stories of it being located in a racially mixed neighbourhood with a history of poor student achievement. I was also mindful of the changes Jeanette had initiated at the school since her arrival: how all students were situated in combined grade/year groupings; how teachers kept their students for two years, over two grades; how portfolio assessment was used to understand the growth of children; how teddy bears became the symbol for "a place to belong." I understood these stories from my own prior involvement with student teachers at the school. My evolving

identity as a researcher at Ravine was narratively shaped, in part, by having worked with student-teachers at the school in my capacity as a university facilitator and through a prior teaching experience with Jeanette.

As a former instructor and field experience coordinator at the university, I had occasion to teach an introductory level education course, one designed to introduce pre-practicum students to the life of the classroom. I was unhappy with the existing outline for the course. It suggested that all of my teaching be done on campus and my students scattered to various school sites for the practicum component of the course. I didn't feel that it would give me a context for their teaching. "How am I to make meaningful connections between on-campus experiences and in-classroom experiences? There are some tensions for me around the requirements for the course that don't fit [with how I wanted to re-imagine this spring course]... Tensions around the required text, location of placements, and instructor and school honoraria..." (Journal entry, March 23, 2002). I needed to find a way to live and work within the tensions. Needing to find a space for collaboration in my teaching, I approached my colleague, Pam Steeves. We had shared an office at the Centre for a few years and, through this, had also shared many thoughtful conversations. Pam had experience with both undergraduate and graduate teaching, and was "immediately caught up in the excitement of co-teaching a course and helping me imagine a new plotline" (Journal entry, March 23, 2002).

Pam and I both had prior experience with Jeanette and Ravine Elementary: Pam as a researcher and I as a university facilitator working alongside student teachers. Jeanette readily agreed to allow Ravine to be the homeplace for the university students during the course. She also agreed to act as a third co-instructor.

The compressed course was taught daily over three weeks during the spring of 2002, and Pam, Jeanette, and I spent many hours preparing our lessons. We came together to puzzle through what was important in the development of a teaching identity. Having our university students at a school site each day for the three weeks allowed for the unfolding of a place where what was learned in the formal coursework about teaching connected with what was practiced in real classrooms where teaching occurred.

> Giving our student teachers opportunities to develop relationships at the school through our school-based course gives us time for our own relationships. Working alongside Pam and Jeanette has also given me a deeper understanding of how I see myself as a teacher and the importance of relationship in continuing identity formation. (Journal entry, June 3, 2002)

And so I entered Ravine Elementary as a researcher not only in the midst of the life of the school but understanding myself as part of the narrative history of the place. I was invited onto the school landscape with a team of researchers: Shaun Murphy, Anne Murray-Orr, and our doctoral supervisor, Jean Clandinin who, along with Michael Connelly, had linked our individual projects to their larger project. Shaun, Anne, and I already shared a story as we were travelling through graduate work together, alongside Jean and other colleagues at the Centre. From the beginning, we always imagined our research, our lives, to be connected. Jeanette, the principal at Ravine, welcomed our presence, trusting that it would help her continue to live a wide-awake life (Dillard, 1998). Ravine Elementary was almost an hour away from my home, but the opportunity to compose my narrative history alongside other researchers with whom I had already

developed strong relationships, in a school with an inquiry focus, made any concerns around the distance of my journey disappear.

We were all comfortable in the school. As we often gathered to talk and share moments of our days, we were constantly reminded that we were definitely entering the school in the midst of nested and unfolding stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). We were reminded, too, that children and families also entered the school in the midst of their own stories and everyone found different entry points and ways to belong.

Second moment: Awakening to a story of community.

> I walked into the staff meeting having a strong sense of the flow of these events. I was surprised when Jeanette chose to begin with a story. This was a new experience for me. I was not used to hearing children's picture books being read at a school staff meeting. What is the story of this place? "Today we live, but by tomorrow, today will be a story," Jeanette said. (Field note, August 29, 2002)

I entered this school landscape wanting to understand the experiences of children who lived on this landscape. What was their story of school? What was the story the school constructed of them? What was the story of community on this landscape? As Jeanette, the school principal, read *Hooray for Diffendoofer Day* (Seuss *et al.*, 1998) at that first staff meeting, my field notes captured some of my wonders.

> Only one voice wrote the story of Diffendoofer School. I wonder how the story might have looked if multiple voices were represented. I wonder about the story of Ravine and the people who come together in this space. (Field note, August 29, 2002)

The narrative thread that was most evident in those early staff meetings was one of belonging to the school community. Ravine Elementary School is a urban school in a western Canadian city. The school shares a parking lot with a neighbourhood community league. The school and the community league partnered to build a communal playground the summer before I entered the school as researcher. "Instead of thinking of community as a static circle with people on the inside and the outside," Jeanette shared at the beginning year staff meeting, "maybe we should imagine it as almost a flowing line that exists around the work that we do. Maybe this will allow people to be drawn in" (Field note, August 29, 2002). Jeanette continued to pull forward this thread of community throughout the year. A parent notice board was established that provided information about school happenings and learning activities, and regular school celebrations were planned that involved family and community members. At the very first school assembly of the year, Jeanette was joined by a group of children to present a thank you photo collage to a member of the community league for assistance with the play park project. For Jeanette, this was a way of living out her image of community.

Each student was also given his or her own "M&M" book at the beginning of the year. The book, to be filled with "messages and memos," was a way for school staff to communicate with families. Most teachers also included a weekly newsletter that invited parents to share their comments, wonders, concerns, or celebrations. Each grade grouping of teachers hosted a parent information evening at the beginning of school to meet parents and discuss the upcoming year.

While the school held regular assemblies designed to bring the school members together at various points in the year, there were also weekly opportunities for children

and staff from specific grades to come together. The school was divided into three learning groups, focused on students' year in school rather than their grade—primary (including Kindergarten through to year two); junior (years three and four); and senior (years five and six). Each week the specific grouping would gather in the music room loft and sing songs, listen to stories, share learnings, and celebrate being together. At the close of each assembly, Jeanette would invite the staff and any parents in attendance to share with the children something they had noticed from the prior week. I saw this as another way Jeanette was building community at the school. Comments often revolved around something special that had occurred in a class. The sharing was a way of drawing everyone together across that flowing line into the community of the school.

> When we got back from recess it was time for primary assembly up in the music room. Jeanette and Suzanne were already there greeting the children as they walked in the door… Jeanette mentioned to everyone that this was the first time the Kindergarten children were joining the primary assembly and she hoped the year one and two children would act as good role models. One little girl mentioned that the Kindergarten children should learn about "give me five" so Jeanette invited her up to demonstrate for everyone. As the little girl held up each finger and explained the meaning behind each one—eyes on speaker, brain turned on, hands still, feet still, good listening—Jeanette asked the rest of the children gathered to echo back these phrases. There appeared to be two or three parents present as well—I think they were volunteering in the Kindergarten classroom. The assembly today was focused on playground safety. Jeanette introduced two senior kids wearing bright red vests as school safety patrollers… I noticed when

> Jeanette asked for responses from the primary kids she would always use their names when addressing them… Four children from the audience were invited to participate in a role play about crossing the staff parking lot to the playground… A year five-six class had partnered with their year one-two "cross-age" class to make a video about playing safely in the park that was played at the assembly and kids called out when they recognized a friend or sibling on the TV. They were excited to see faces of others they knew. One of the messages on the video addressed the need to keep sand out of the classroom and one of the parents called out, "I think you have some of your sand at my home!"… At the end of the assembly Jeanette went around the room and asked the adults gathered if they had anything they wished to share with the children. The children's heads swivelled around as they listened attentively to each adult share something about the video, the writing around the school, or the way the children were really working hard in their classes. The assembly ended with a song that Jeanette and Suzanne said was one of their favourites. "Four hugs a day" was played on the tape recorder and the kids and teachers snapped their fingers, did the actions and sang along... On the way out many of the kids stopped to give Jeanette and Suzanne hugs. (Field note, September 19, 2002)

Students were also given cross-age partners in the school. For example, a year one-two class was paired with a year five-six class, a Kindergarten class with a year three-four class, and the students often got together to work on crafts or other special activities. The design of the school also afforded many opportunities for staff to collaborate and co-plan. Many of the classrooms had pods connecting one room to

another. Teachers often used these places as planning and meeting rooms, giving them an opportunity to talk about life in their individual classrooms.

> Gale was in the pod when I arrived today. She and Marian (a year one-two teacher) were preparing for the celebrations of learning next week…When Laura (another year one-two teacher) came in the conversation moved to the topic of report cards. Laura was struggling with how to imagine writing comments for a child who is trying hard but not achieving at an acceptable standard… Gale talked about the sibling that she had once taught and how she had worked with the parents to set goals for this child. She wondered if it might be possible for Laura to make time to talk with the parents before writing the report card. (Field note, November 18, 2002)

During my time at Ravine I often witnessed these reflective conversations. While many times teachers would gather before school, coffee in hand, in the staff room, or hallways, it was typically these classroom pods that provided opportunities for them to have sustained conversations about things that mattered to them.

Through combined year classroom groupings, cross-age partners, and weekly assemblies, Jeanette continued to reinforce that community in the school extended beyond the classroom walls. Jeanette wanted everyone to experience Ravine as a place to belong. This sense of belonging permeated the school. Jeanette's office was filled with children's books and other artifacts that told stories of her relationships with her family, her colleagues, and the students and families she had worked with at Ravine and other schools. Jeanette's door was always open and she welcomed any chance to get to know

more of someone's story by inviting them to have a seat at the table in the centre of her office. She was never too busy for a conversation.

Throughout the school Jeanette shaped places that invited these conversations. There were park benches in hallways, large stuffed beanbag chairs in the library, and several pit areas with tables and chairs. Each year since her arrival Jeanette initiated a whole school art project that shaped out-of-classroom places on the landscape. She wanted these projects to trigger stories, to open conversations, and to bring everyone together.

Previous administrators at Ravine had created a vision for the school that was understood through a saying and illustration painted on one of the gymnasium walls. Jeanette carried on this tradition. But while Jeanette's predecessor had chosen "We're #1!" as a theme for the school, suggesting a story of competition, Jeanette had decided on "A Place to Belong," which for her was a story that spoke to collaboration and community.

Third moment: A place of inquiry.

The school year opened with two days of meetings, times planned as professional growth opportunities for teachers and other staff members. Jeanette seemed to be trying to make everyone feel included as they started a new story in a new school year. On the second morning, Jeanette reminded everyone of their homework from the day before. She had asked staff to "bring a quote, book, or novel" that they had read or come across over the summer months. "Something that made you think or matters to you in some way," she told them (Field note, August 30, 2002). Jeanette seemed to be creating a place for

each individual in the community by inviting them to connect their lives out of school to their lives inside of school.

Conversations broke out in small groups as teachers animatedly talked about their summer readings. After one person shared, others around the table responded with how the quote or excerpt connected with their stories to live by as teachers about to begin a new school year. This eventually led to a larger whole group sharing and one staff member asked if the quotes or passages could be printed up and posted on the staff room walls for people to come back to. At the end of the sharing, Jeanette handed out metal engraved bookmarks to everyone reminding them to "bookmark" important moments in their lives this year, "things we want to share and have conversations about" (Field note, August 30, 2002).

The focus on inquiry and sharing conversations was also worked into teachers' timetables. Jeanette arranged classroom schedules so teachers had a full morning of prep time once every two weeks instead of single periods scattered throughout the week. This was designed to allow teachers opportunities to visit each other's classrooms, have sustained time to meet with parents, work individually with students from their classrooms, meet with consultants or specialists, or spend time on unit or lesson planning.

The presence of Jean, Shaun, Anne, and me also shaped how the school was becoming a place of inquiry. Our presence in classrooms, hallways, assemblies, staff meetings, and other school events often resulted in staff members engaging us in conversation about our work and life in their classrooms. Several other graduate students, part of our research community at the Centre at the university, also participated in other aspects of the larger research project in various classrooms at the school. Several student

teachers were also in the school during the year as a follow-up to the spring course earlier taught by Jeanette, Pam, and me. Jeanette and Pam decided to invite some of the student teachers back as part of a research project designed to examine the continuity of experience in student teacher placements.

When most of these research projects began to negotiate ending places, Jeanette and several of the staff members began to wonder about ways of keeping an inquiry focus alive in the school. They had become used to the inquiry conversations started by our presence in the school and imagined forming a book club as a place to continue with these inquiry conversations. The book club, including Pam and Jean, continued to meet on a regular basis the following year.

Fourth moment: Writing as an instructional focus.

During those beginning year staff meetings, I understood how Jeanette was trying to continue a plotline in the story of Ravine. She imagined "the power of writing our stories" as a way of pulling the school together in community. Stemming from a district initiative, the staff at Ravine selected writing to be the instructional focus during the previous year. This year Jeanette wanted the staff to continue this focus and introduced the idea of a writer's notebook to help facilitate this goal.

Interested in the work of Calkins (1991), Jeanette followed up with her staff in late August on the idea of a writer's notebook, an idea that had been initiated at a staff professional development day the previous spring.

> She spoke about a notebook as being different than a journal, as being a "place that listens"... When Jeanette shared her own notebook she spoke of the "ah-ha"

> moments that she didn't want to lose but wanted a place to be able to return to them. She asked the staff to experiment with notebooks at the same time they were asking their students to keep notebooks… "We need to struggle with this process ourselves," she said, "so we can all learn to attend carefully to our worlds." (Field note, August 30, 2002)

This focus on writing was visible throughout the year. A parent notice board, situated near the front of the school, outlined the writing process at the school. Samples of children's writing filled bulletin boards, and students were often asked to share their efforts on the morning announcements or during school assembly times.

Jeanette was interested in children's books as a way of encouraging reflection in herself and her staff and as a way of connecting with feelings and behaviour. She often used books to help uncover and explore the assumptions the staff at Ravine held about teaching and learning. Reading and reflecting on children's literature was a way for Jeanette to help staff and students to author their own lives. At the beginning-year staff meeting she gave a divider to each staff member and asked them to place it at the front of their staff meeting binders. "I'd like you each to draw a book on your divider and write five words coming out of that book that speak to you about your vision for you as a staff member, and for all of us at Ravine," she said (Field note, August 29, 2002). Staff members were then asked to wander around the room and add a word important to them on the dividers of others in the room. Finally, Jeanette unrolled a large mural of a painted book and asked staff to choose one of their words to inscribe upon it. "We're all responsible for writing the story of Ravine," she told them (Field note, August 29, 2002).

At Christmas time, Jeanette presented each staff member and each researcher with a hand-made wooden book spine. On the spine she had inscribed "Remember the Children." Jeanette always brought everything back to a focus on the children in the school. Students in each classroom were also asked to decorate their own wooden book spines. The finished products were glued on shelves which were then hung over every classroom door. "See, you all are writers," she told the school during announcements on the televised in-school news network. "And you have amazing stories to tell" (Field note, December 8, 2002).

Fifth moment: The living and teaching of character education through virtues and children's literature.

Children's literature was an important plotline in the story of Ravine Elementary. By the time a school board initiative sent out a directive for all schools to implement a character education program, Ravine's program had already been well established. Jeanette, the school principal, and Suzanne, the teacher-librarian, organized a program around a series of virtues which involved an exploration of ways to attend to lives through the themes revealed through children's literature.

> Jeanette and Suzanne read the story *I Wish I Were a Butterfly* (Howe, 1987) today as they introduced the children to the virtue of pride. The story tells of a wise dragonfly that helps a despondent cricket realize that he is special in his own way. The littlest cricket at Swampswallow Pond learns that being special means more than having flashy colours or shimmering wings and he begins to see the beauty in his music and his friendships… At the end of the story Jeanette told the

students gathered around that "I think you're beautiful just as you are." (Field note, September 26, 2002)

School staff at Ravine chose 20 virtues for the year, two to be introduced each month at regular assemblies. These monthly virtues were posted around the school and on the large notice board positioned outside the front doors. At times they were woven into daily announcements or library displays. This approach to character education was intended to give the children multiple entry points into understanding the teaching and living of virtues and to allow them to share a common language. Children's literature was used as an invitation for children to also tell their stories. Jeanette wanted to build a community in the school through these assemblies where everyone could participate. Jeanette wanted to participate, too, and author a story of moral education together with the children, staff, and families. It was important to Jeanette to know some of the story of every student in the school. She came to know these stories through these regular assemblies, visits to classrooms, and from living day-to-day alongside the children in the school. She listened carefully to the stories that came her way through teachers, parents, and children. She often used children's literature to help her give back someone's story that might cause them to reflect on their behaviour or choices they had made.

> Jeanette began by telling the children, "You need to know that I'm upset." Holding up pages of notes that she had received over the past week she started to speak to the small group of children gathered about how she was "disappointed in their behaviour recently."... She reminded them of the story that had been read at the assembly, *Hunter's Best Friend at School (Elliott, 2002)*, which spoke to peer pressure and making poor choices... Jeanette tried to get the children to think of

> their own actions on the playground and this opened up a discussion on feelings… Jeanette then went on to talk about what it means to have fun and invited the children to share some stories of fun times they had experienced. (Field note, May 8, 2003)

The story of character education at Ravine was shaped by who Jeanette was as a principal as she lived an unfolding and interconnected story with the students, families, and staff at the school. Jeanette worked hard to create school stories that would bring people together in ways that fit her image of community.

Returning to the Collector of Moments

It was my prior relationship with Jeanette and Ravine School, along with my ongoing relationships with my research colleagues, that, like Max's paintings in *The Collector of Moments* (Buchholz & Neumeyer, 1999), included conversations and "happenings that confused me and mesmerized me" and helped me imagine my research. As the young boy in *The Collector of Moments* spends long spells becoming lost in the pictures, I spent several mornings a week over the course of a school year in a year one-two classroom at Ravine becoming lost in my research puzzle around the experience of community. For a student in school, learning is the process of entering into a community. As a researcher, I was also interested in learning, and I brought with me my pencils, my notebooks, my tape recorder, and my willingness to listen. It was these notes, scratched in pencil in my research notebook, and my conversations with my participants and research colleagues that helped me make sense of my experiences. Max paints his pictures as a way of making sense of what he sees, feels, understands, and knows. For me it was by

attending to my wonders, in relation to and with others that I began to make sense of "what I saw, felt, and came to understand and know." The following moments, captured in my field texts, speak to how I was pulled into the classroom and caused to pause to try to understand the story attached to the moment. My learning was not static, nor limited to what occurred for me during my time in the classroom. Instead it was unfolding, moving between my experiences both in and out of the classroom, on and off the school landscape. For Max, his learning occurred in relationship with the professor, the paintings, and the experiences of his own life. For me, my learning occurred also in relationship—with my participants and other staff at the school, my research colleagues, and alongside other moments and experiences in my life.

Classroom moment 1: Chicken soup with rice.

In September for a while, I will ride a crocodile
Down the chicken soupy Nile.
Paddle once, paddle twice, paddle chicken soup with rice.
...
In January it's so nice while slipping on the sliding ice
To sip hot chicken soup with rice.
Sipping once, sipping twice, sipping chicken soup with rice.
...
In June I saw a charming group of roses all begin to droop.
I pepped them up with chicken soup!
Sprinkle once, sprinkle twice, sprinkle chicken soup with rice. (Sendak, 1962)

Gale and the other primary teachers opened each new month with the familiar Sendak series of poems, *Chicken Soup with Rice* (1962). Children chanted the poem and then joined together in sharing a bowl of chicken soup with rice prior to going out for recess. On the first day of each new month, Gale always had a pot of soup simmering at the back of the room. This sharing was designed to be fun and to bring the children in the primary grades together. Some of Gale's students failed to bring snack on a regular basis

and this was one way students could share in a small meal together. If a child did not want the soup, Gale gently offered crackers as a way for the child to participate in the activity. As Gale introduced each new poem the students would often spontaneously recite together verses from previous months. This would often lead to conversations about favourite activities in the different months or things that the children could look forward to in the upcoming month. For Gale, the Chicken Soup with Rice activities not only provided a way of introducing new curriculum to her students, but also were a means of staying connected with her fellow primary teachers. The monthly ritual also speaks to Gale's belief in creating spaces for children to come together, share experiences, and feel a sense of belonging.

Classroom moment 2: Learning conversations.

> Gale spoke to the parents gathered about her plans to arrange "reverse parent-teacher interviews" at the end of September. She spoke of these meetings as "learning conversations" where parents would have a chance to tell her about their child, particularly since all of the students were new to her this year. She hoped this would allow her to get to know more about her students' lives outside of school. (Field note, September 9, 2002)

Gale was the only teacher at Ravine that hosted early year "learning conversations" with family members at the end of September. A letter went home in each student's "Messages and Memos" book inviting parents to sign up for a half hour conversation on one of two possible dates. "This is a chance for me to learn about your son or daughter from you. What are your child's interests? What do you wish for your

child this year? What do you think is important for me to know about your child?" Gale wrote in the letter home (Field text, September 20, 2002). All but four families took Gale up on her offer.

> Gale and I tidied up the room as soon as the children left. She was eager for the learning conversations to start. Gale had prepared tea, coffee, and juice as a welcome for families and had it waiting by the table near the door of the classroom. I helped her set up another area on the opposite side of the room to meet with parents. She had put flowers on the table and a few other ornaments to make it seem inviting… Mala was the first to arrive with her mother and older sister. Gale thanked them all for coming and asked Mala to introduce her mother and sister to us before suggesting the two girls share some stories together in the library. (Letter, September 23, 2002)

Gale used the learning conversations as a way to hear parents' stories of the students in her classroom. She recognized that they came to her classroom with different experiences and from differing backgrounds and cultures. She had no scripts for these conversations, but simply responded to comments from parents. For Gale and the parents, this was a move away from the script of how parent-teacher meetings were usually lived out on school landscapes. At times, some parents appeared uncomfortable when asked to share stories about their children and instead tried to ask Gale how their son or daughter was performing in school. This script of teacher as expert appeared strongly embedded in some, while others took great delight in talking about their children. "Thank you for this. It was great. I could sit for hours talking about her," Tessa's mom said (Field note, September 23, 2002).

When I saw Gale again a few days later she was still excited by what had occurred at the learning conversations.

> It was really, really interesting the different directions parents went and the kinds of conversations we got into…And then I met with Troy's dad and that was so helpful. Troy has two homes and two completely different homes and his dad was really comfortable talking to me. Troy stayed and I wasn't, I wasn't really counting on kids this time but watching Troy with his dad was so wonderful. He's so different with his dad than he is in the classroom and we could talk about that and I think it helps me understand better who he is in the classroom… I found out that Dallas's grandma is dying of bone cancer and I shared how Dallas is always complaining about a sore back or sore leg or something like that… They helped me see how close Dallas is to his grandma and how it's all probably connected. (Transcript of conversation, September 26, 2002)

Our lunch conversation this day was completely taken up by Gale sharing stories about her students that she had learned over the past few evenings. To accommodate families' needs, Gale had a few more meetings planned for the rest of the week and was still trying to connect with the families that had not responded to her invitation for a learning conversation. She felt that spending time with parents in this way, prior to the more formal report card time, helped shift her knowing of the students in her classroom. She felt more prepared "to engage with them" in teaching and learning activities (Transcript of conversation, September 26, 2002). The meetings also served to help her connect with the families and involve them in what she saw as the community of the classroom.

This connecting with families was a theme that recurred throughout the year for Gale as parents were invited into the classroom on a regular basis. In late winter of the school year, Gale introduced a unit on families as part of the social studies curriculum. Each student was given a blank page from a photo album and, for homework, was asked to create a mosaic of their family to share with their classmates. Mala brought her mother in when it was her turn to share. They were both dressed in beautiful saris and Mala was so proud as her mother helped her talk about the pictures she had chosen to include on her page. There was a strong sense of connection as children asked their questions and sometimes shared stories of their own special clothing.

> I was also asked to contribute a page to the album the class was making. The children were so eager to see and hear about my storied photo album page. I talked about how the project had become a family activity in my home—just as it had in many of theirs. My own children were excited to help me choose the pictures that I would share with the class. One of the pictures my son had chosen that he thought the class would enjoy showed him and his sister acting out a scene from one of the Captain Underpants books. Tony and Sarah immediately recognized the playacting my children were doing in the photo but many of the other kids just laughed to see my children in their underwear… They had so many questions about me and my kids—Gale too… Someone even asked if I could bring my kids to the classroom one day… It was wonderful to feel so connected and so known in this new way. I loved being able to talk to these children about my own children at home. (Field note, March 3, 2003)

By asking the children to include a page celebrating their families in the class photo album, Gale was honouring who the children were out of school. The photo album pages called her to attend to their lives. The unit on families was shaped by the diverse narratives of experience we all brought to this activity. Gale was continuing to open up spaces to learn about the children's stories from the children and their families. She wanted to connect with families, to know her students as people.

Classroom moment 3: Exploration time.

Gale began most days in the same way, with exploration time. She recognized that the days were long, primarily for the year one children, and they were used to a centre approach from their time in Kindergarten. Gale also recognized that when her children passed through her door first thing every morning they often had a story to share. She knew that she did not have the time to listen to each one of her 25 children, so exploration time gave them a chance to share conversations and unstructured playtime with their classmates. There were several areas around the room that were open to children at this time and there were no restrictions as to where they could go, as long as they were respectful of the material and each other. When I commented to Gale that I noticed how Travis always seemed to go to the Lego area she responded, "He's obviously getting his needs met there then. He always has a lot to say when he arrives in the morning and most of the other boys who like to play there are busy building so Travis can be the one talking" (Field note, November 18, 2002).

Gale saw exploration time as a space and time for children to talk about their stories and listen to others' stories. She would often sit with the children joining them as

they acted out stories in the puppet theatre, made patterns with manipulatives, drew pictures or shared stories at the listening centre. Here she would listen to them talk about their adventures at out-of-school activities, watch them negotiate sharing materials or finding ways to work together, encourage their imagination, and let them slowly settle in to begin a new day of school. For the children, exploration time was often their favourite time of the day. Prior to this year Gale had typically planned exploration time for later in the day and had understood it as a time for students to have a break from structured learning activities, but since her return from graduate work with an interest in attending to care and relationships, Gale saw exploration time as a place where lives intermingled and she and her students could be present to one another and learn from each other's stories.

Classroom moment 4: Daily routines.

Although there was a great deal of variety from one day to the next, Gale also valued the importance of routines. She assumed each child would come to school each day and attendance was duly recorded and submitted to the office. After exploration time, the children would return to their seats and together with Gale they would read or, later in the school year, decode the morning message. Gale used this time as a way of introducing new vocabulary and teaching grammar and phonics in context. Beside the morning message Gale always printed the day's agenda and she would spend time reviewing with the children how the day would look. Sometimes morning message would follow with a printing or spelling lesson using miniature chalk boards, but most often Gale would gather the students in the meeting area at the back of the room. Children took turns being

the teacher's assistant and helping with the calendar and weather chart. Days at school were also recorded in anticipation of celebrating the 100th day at school with a large party. The children anxiously awaited their turn to be the assistant, knowing that everyone would get several turns through the course of the year.

Gale believed that routines gave the children a sense of responsibility. She expected the older students to model appropriate behaviour for the younger students until everyone knew what to expect from the daily recurring activities.

Gale always ended her day in the same way. Children were invited to gather their belongings from the back of the room and meet her at the door to receive their "exit pass." The exit pass was another way Gale connected with her students as individuals. She asked them to recite their phone number or address, to share what they were planning to be for Halloween or to recall something they had learned during the day. One day I watched Tessa return to the classroom after all the children had already left for the day. "I forgot to say goodbye to Mrs. Hammitt and get my exit pass," she said (Field note, January 27, 2003). This routine was important to her and part of the way she experienced who she was in the classroom.

Classroom moment 5: Exploring an ethic of care.

Gale was an experienced educator who had been teaching early childhood and primary students for over 25 years. The year prior to my research in her classroom, Gale received a sabbatical from her school board and returned to university to pursue her master's degree in elementary education. Her area of interest was moral education. Because Gale returned to the classroom in the midst of trying to imagine her final

capping paper at the same time I was beginning to live out my own research wonders, we both felt my presence might make a meaningful contribution to each other's work. While I was wondering about the stories of experience of members of a community, Gale wanted to imagine new stories to live and tell with her students around issues of care and respect.

Gale began her master's program with an interest in researching character education. "I was on a quest for the one right answer… over time my interest shifted to looking at teaching as a caring relationship with students," she told me (Field note, June 12, 2002).

Though I was attending to the experiences of children and parents in Gale's classroom, I was also aware of how Gale's questions around character education shaped how she was trying to live out a new teaching story. Upon her return to Ravine she shared her desire to have the children help shape the learning environment in the classroom and to involve them in the unfolding of the classroom story. She imagined beginning the year with an uncluttered classroom only to end with one filled with the busy-ness of children's school lives.

> Gale's room, along with the other primary classrooms, is situated around a circular shared pod near the front of the school. She had placed the students' desks in groups of four and there were two round tables on the perimeter of the room. There was also a meeting area where the class could gather to participate in morning routine. The room had a sense of openness with bookshelves placed against one wall and coat racks against another. Very little adorned bulletin boards. The alphabet was displayed above the white board at the front of the

> room. Birthday charts, number lines, and animated literacy characters covered parts of the walls. Another area awaited sight words yet to be taught. She told me that she used to have the room all decorated and ready for the children on the first day. But now she wants the children to imprint the room with their lives, their stories of experience. (Field note, August 30, 2002)

However, there were tensions for Gale as she prepared for this new school year. Gale was part of a primary team of four year one-two teachers who were clustered together in one end of the school. They shared a pit area in front of their classrooms and had a history of team planning and composing common newsletters. The other primary teachers told a story of Gale as organized, thoughtful, and committed to her students and to the team. They were surprised, however, when, before the school year began, Gale's classroom took on a different look and feel.

> Gale's primary teaching partners all commented on the relative barrenness of the classroom. "It won't last," laughed one of the teachers, as Gale finished preparing her room for the first day of school. The teachers talked about how Gale's class was typically the busiest of all of the primary rooms, normally filled with manipulatives, shelves bursting with materials, decorated bulletin boards, and lots of nooks and crannies for children to work individually or in small groups. (Field note, August 30, 2002)

Gale sent a personal summer letter home to each of her students inviting them to visit her and the classroom before the official start of school. As children drifted in with their families during this week of "open house," she encouraged them to choose where to keep their belongings, where they would like to sit to begin the year, and asked them to

assist with a job, whether cutting out patterns or helping organize materials, to help get the classroom ready for learning.

Involving parents in classroom life was important to Gale, so she was troubled when one of her primary teaching partners placed a copy of a recent "teacher talk" newsletter in her mailbox. In it one of the teachers had asked parents to say goodbye to their children in the boot room to reduce the separation anxiety some of the children were experiencing in school. Gale could not bring herself to send it home and instead created her own newsletter for the week. "What message does that send to parents, to children, if I send that home?" she wondered (Field note, September 19, 2002). Instead, Gale felt the caring thing to do would be to invite parents in with their children, to make them feel part of the classroom and to facilitate a "smoother home-school transition" (Field note, September 19, 2002).

As the year progressed, Gale continued to wonder about how to live an ethic of care with her students. She examined and then dismissed "packaged character education programs" and instead began to think of life in her classroom in terms of Noddings' (2002) work on care theory. "I want my students to feel cared for and to care about others… Caring isn't about teaching a virtue…. [but] about relationship," Gale believed (Transcript of conversation, January 9, 2003). In her final capping paper, Gale wrote, "Caring is not a subject or curriculum but more a way of being, a way of living, a context in which the community functions. It is people engaged in interactions and the building of relationships."[6] For Gale, putting care at the centre of her teaching practices was a way of creating a belonging place that valued the individual.

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[6] The reference for this quotation has not been cited in order to respect the anonymity of my research participant.

Continually Collecting Moments

As a narrative inquirer I continually collected moments during my time at Ravine, moments that confused me and mesmerized me and pulled me into the story of the school, the classroom, and the lives of the people on the landscape. There is much to discover in these moments. There is much that remains elusive and untold. These moments I collected during my time at Ravine always occurred in the midst. They were moments that connected to past stories and to future ones. Something unusual happened in these moments and I continued to return to them over time. Through closely walking alongside two young children, Aaron and Sadie, I was drawn into these moments as I was drawn into their lives, and I began to think narratively about community, re-imagining it as something multiple, fluid, relational, and complex.

Chapter 4

Witness

Towards the end of my year in Gale's year one-two classroom at Ravine Elementary, I found myself reading a story by Karen Hesse to my son. *Witness* (Hesse, 2001), written in free verse, tells the story of a small town in the 1920s that is becoming increasingly influenced by the Ku Klux Klan. The story, written from the perspective of 11 unique and memorable characters, pieces together a word image (Clandinin *et al.*, Forthcoming) of a group of people coming to multiple places of awareness of who they are in this small town.

At night, after reading several pages, my son and I would often begin to sketch out loud what we were coming to know about some of the main characters. While I would see someone in one particular way, my son would often have something different to share about his knowing of this character. We were responding to the story and to the people in the small town, based on our own lived experiences in the world. The way I looked at life came through in the moments I chose to identify with, the interpretations I chose to make. My son often looked at things from a different place. Reading this story together opened up a space of dialogue for us. It helped us bear witness to our own place in the world, alongside the characters we were reading about.

My son and I read *Witness* at a time I was trying to imagine how to write about my own experiences at Ravine. The books I choose to read for pleasure often help me know something of myself and of the world. In my research writing, I began to wonder how I might show a multiplicity of understanding in a way that would draw the reader into dialogue with my participants. How might I illustrate their unique and memorable

voices? How might I bear witness to the complexity of understanding community? I needed to find a form that had resonance with the experience of the research itself. These thoughts led to an imagining of writing first person accounts of my participants' experiences.

I turned intuitively to narrative verse as a way of representing the connected knowing experience (Belenky, et al, 1986) and also communicating this experience backwards to my participants and forwards to my readers. I posted photographs of my participants over my computer. I pulled out the transcripts of our taped conversations and I combed through my field notes for any mention of their names. And then, before writing, I would look closely into the eyes in the photographs and look inward to myself to the sense of meaning I was making of my participants' experiences. Although my signature remains in this narrative verse, as I was the one shaping the form, my intent was to portray a story of multiple experiences, from multiple perspectives.

I worked with these field texts, both field notes and transcripts, as a starting place, eliminating some words, adding others, shaping the verse using rhythm, pauses, and emotion to situate the experiences of the participants more centrally in my writing. Choosing to write narrative verse was a highly intuitive process based on an emotional response, a creative response, and an academic response to my field texts, my participants' lives, and my experiences alongside them.

Writing in this way served an important purpose for me. It allowed me to see and represent experience from multiple perspectives. It also helped me slow down and wonder about the moments I had experienced or witnessed in the classroom. It was a hard thing to slow down enough to listen carefully to the stories. Writing this narrative verse

also helped me understand more about my participants' experiences as I took these narrative verses back to them for further conversation. It allowed me to resonate more deeply with their experiences, to travel to their worlds (Lugones, 1987). Connelly and Clandinin (2000) remind me that to "experience an experience is to experience it simultaneously in these four ways [inward, outward, backwards and forwards] and to ask questions pointing each way" (p. 416). They say there is an autobiographical component of research, where the researcher's own memories will be evoked and will influence the meaning making of the experiences captured. This suggests then that the reader of a narrative inquiry also has a role in meaning making as they, too, experience an experience and bring their own form of meaning to the text.

In the middle of composing my research text my supervisor asked me to make explicit the decision for including some of this narrative verse in this dissertation. "Why not leave it as an interim text?" she asked (Transcript of conversation, February 15, 2005). Her comment made me inquire more deeply into the form of my writing, of my decisions to move between field texts, interim texts, and research texts. As one of the goals of this inquiry was to retell lived experience, I chose narrative verse to help make the world of my research accessible to the reader. My research puzzle revolved around the experiences of two diverse children, and their stories are more fully reflected in subsequent chapters. However, it was their teacher's story that became the backdrop for understanding many of these experiences. In this chapter, I include Gale's voice as it was situated alongside my two young participants' voices. It is by giving them voices in the research text that I honour their stories.

I also experienced a dilemma when considering where to place this chapter in this dissertation. I felt it needed the theoretical constructs found in chapter 2 but also needed to come before the telling and retelling of stories of experience of my two young participants. Placing this chapter in the middle of the dissertation, following an introduction to my research site, gives it a temporal sense of how it came to be in my research journey, but also frames it and threads it with theory, experience, and understanding.

Not all of the original narrative verse is shared here. I selected the pieces that I hope will make my participants' "worlds" accessible to the reader, that will evoke insights and sensory responses. I do not attempt to tell the entire story, the experiences, in all of their complexity here. Nor do I inquire into the experiences and the meaning I am making around the notion of community. Rather, I selected the parts that connect experiences, connect people, together. It is the between spaces in the narrative verse where the understanding of experience, of lives, begins. Much as a walk through the woods, I have created a possible path so as to not leave a reader wandering through dense detail unsure of what it is he or she is meant to be noticing.

June 8

Gale

It's new again
I'm starting over
I didn't
        at first
think I'd go back there,

the same school.

But now it's nice
going back
I'm thinking.

It's the same
but not,
        not really.
I want to be different
        live different
but I'm just moving forward
into who I am

It's not long now
summer's almost
here
And I'm looking forward
looking forward
to going back
I know the place.

September 4

Gale

I started the day
with songs
To give me energy
The children too.
If you're happy and you
know it.
Chicka-chicka-boom-
boom.
Most kids sang along
But not Aaron
I am already worried
about Aaron.

Sadie ate her sandwich
for snack - I wonder if
she had breakfast?
She had a brown paper
bag
and it fell apart, right in
two.
I think I'll have to split up
Seeta and Sadie.
But I might wait,
for a while.

I haven't met Sadie's
mom
yet.
She didn't come to the
open house
But I know Travis,
her brother.
I remember him
when he was in Grade 1.

I had forgotten
how exhausting
being a year one-two
teacher is,
and it's only
the first week.

sadie

the others were singing
but i didn't know
the song
so i didn't sing the song
but i was happy. i clapped
my hands when i saw the
others clap their hands
i just
didn't know the song

but i know Seeta
she sits beside me
and that's okay with me
it makes me
happy
too.

i'm so hungry
i ate my sandwich
"keep it for lunch," my
teacher said
why would I keep it for
lunch
when I'm hungry
now?

aaron

i know this place
i've been here before
it was Kindergarten
but now i'm in Grade 2
yeah.
i went to a couple
schools in between
stayed home some too.
it's okay here i guess.
at least i know the
place.

but i'd rather be home
yeah.
home with my grandma
and my aunt
Jessica.

September 11

Gale

Aaron was wearing
sunglasses today.
I didn't want to say
anything. I realized,
it wasn't a big deal,
really.
And eventually he took
them off anyway.

I wondered, for a while, if
I should cut
Sadie's nails.
She slipped on the
monkey bars at recess
and showed me her
hands,
covered in blisters
and her nails, all cracked
and dirty, in need of a
trim.
But I don't know
anymore.
I do have to keep my eye
on Aaron.
He's not focusing or
engaging
much.

sadie

Seeta and me played on
the monkey bars.
she had to help me up
at first.

but then i could do it
myself.
until I slipped
and she took me in
to get a band-aid.

it was still fun
anyways.

aaron

she's trying to tell me
rules for exploration
time
like to use quiet voices
and put things back
where you found them.

i like the Lego best
but Head and Shoulders
is a silly song
Bradley copied me,
until i told him to stop.
i don't like no one
copying me
here.

September 26

Gale

Assembly today.
I had to speak to several
kids
telling them to sit still
or be quiet
or
you'll have to wait until
the assembly is over
to go to the bathroom.

I told the kids later
I was disappointed with
their behaviour.
Chandra covered his ears
but I wasn't referring to
him.
"I think this class really
has to work on listening,"
I told them all.

sadie

Chandra covered his ears
when teacher said

disappointed
i'm disappointed with
your behaviour
in assembly
why did Chandra cover
his ears?
she didn't call his name.
she called mine
Seeta's too
she didn't smile
she was
disappointed
i guess.

aaron

i got in trouble at
assembly
for doing nothing
nothing.
i had to move away
from the others.
Mrs. H yelled at
everyone after
but i wasn't really
listening
i just knew she was
mad.

October 3

Gale

It was colder than
I thought it would be
for our ravine walk.

Sarah said she could see
her breath and
Shelby heard the leaves
rustle.
Others talked about
the wind
and the birds.

Michael was great with
Amal
taking his hand and
leading him gently
along the path.

Aaron often veered off to
make his own path,
Bradley following him.
I kept having to call them
back.

I showed them my
favourite tree
and together we sketched
it,
all from different angles.
When Sadie was done she
stood up and blocked the
tree
from view
from the others who got
mad and told her to move.
It was hard to keep
asking her to sit.
I know she prefers to keep
moving
so I let her skip ahead on
the path
as we headed back to
school

sadie

the path is up ahead
i've been here before
there's trees and leaves
and rocks and stuff
when I drag my foot just
so i make my own path
        i like how it looks
                the line in
                the dirt

                it's my
                path
        i made it
"let's sit and sketch this
tree awhile"
        my teacher says
i don't know how
i'd rather dance
i like to move around
        and drag my foot
        in the dirt
        is that a path up
ahead?

aaron

we're using notebooks
today.
down in the ravine.
we went yesterday too
but today
        we get to write
in our notebooks.
Mrs. H said to put on
our outdoor shoes
but these are my only
ones.

me and Bradley walked
together. but i liked
going in the bushes.
finding my own path.
i always found my way
out again.
sometimes Bradley
came too.
that was okay
i guess.

October 7

Gale

It's picture day.
You could tell
just by looking at the
kids all dressed up.

Reva was in a beautiful
sari,
her hair in a
thick braid
down her back.

Bradley's hair was all
slicked back and
Sarah had a new hair do
too.
It was hard not to notice
Sadie
in her stained pink outfit
and uncombed hair
and broken nails.
I should have cut those
nails.

I can't forget the soup.
I hope they don't spill on
their nice clothes.

sadie

picture day
pink pink i'm all in pink

if i close my hands
maybe no one will notice
my dirty nails

i can smell the
chicken soup.
it makes my tummy
growl

aaron

we had to line up for
pictures.
shortest to tallest.
i wanted the back
even though i'm not
as tall as Bradley
or some others.
i wanted the
back.

the soup's okay
i guess.
it's better
with
lots of crackers.

October 24

Gale

They love hearing
stories
about my own kids.
Today I told them about
James and how he tried to
grow
a pumpkin
in a jar when he was
young.
The kids were so excited
when I told how my son
chose a wavy jar
and ended up with a
wavy pumpkin.
"How did you get it out?"
asked Sarah.
Sadie kept her hand on
my knee
as I told how we wrapped a
towel around the jar
before breaking the glass
with a hammer.
"I hope you didn't get
cut,"
Sadie said.
She looks so much better
In those new clothes.

sadie

i'm wearing the clothes
she wants me to wear
teacher gave them to me
from a big bag by her
desk
filled with shirts
and pants and
not much pink
though

i'm wearing the clothes
she wants me to wear

these ones are
pink

October 28

Gale

"Don't go," Sadie told me
when I headed out the
door.
"I'll be back after lunch,"
I responded
with a hug.
I couldn't help but smile.
This is what I love about
teaching.
Sadie's different lately.
She's more at home
in the classroom
and connected
to me.
She showed me the eyes
she drew on her pumpkin
picture.
The one on the cover of her
Halloween booklet.
We chose Troy's eyes to be
carved into our class
pumpkin.
He's an amazing artist
but still doesn't know
much of the alphabet.
He struggles so much.
In gym I had to ask him
and Aaron
to sit on the bench.
I didn't see Aaron run out
into the hallway
but
I saw his head peering
around the door.
I just
don't know what's going
on with him.
And then I look at Sadie
who's trying so hard
she even tiptoed into the
gym and participated in
everything!
Pretending to be a witch
flying, a spider crawling,
a monster stomping,
a pumpkin rolling.
She was so tired
when she got back to the
classroom
she lay down on the
carpet
and almost fell asleep.
I didn't have the heart to
ask her to take her seat.

sadie

i wrote Sadie in the
middle of Marni's
note book
i took my time.
she said my printing
was neat.
i smiled
i've been working hard
to make
my printing neat
and she noticed.

i drew a cat today too
i tried hard
to be
neat
and i smiled when i saw it
was just
like teacher's

but later
just before home time
i was tired
so i laid down on the
carpet when everyone
else went to their desks
but i didn't want to sit
so i laid down instead
no one said
i couldn't.

aaron

me and Troy had to sit
on the benches at gym.
we got into trouble for
crawling on the nets
when we were supposed
to be
witches and ghosts
and stuff
moving around the
room.
i didn't want to be a
witch or a
ghost
maybe a crab – i can
move fast
on my hands and feet.
but Troy told on me
when i went into the
hallway.
i just wanted a drink.
i didn't want to sit
on the bench no more.
he got me in trouble
with the teacher.

November 8

Gale

"I give up,"
Jeanette said
when I entered her office.
She talked to Aaron's
grandma this morning
who said she was pulling
Aaron from school
for two weeks
to go visit family on the
Metis settlement.
It's frustrating. He's
missed so much school
already
even after they promised
this year would be
different.
Jeanette said
she thinks they might
move
to the settlement.

I called Aaron's
grandmother
and asked
maybe
could Aaron stay with me
when you go to the
settlement?
I think I surprised her
but I didn't really want
Aaron to go.
The kids here adore him
and he's learning so
much.
I wonder what will happen
if he leaves again.
He's only in Grade 2
and he's already been in
and out of this school
twice or maybe three
times.
He's supposed to be in
Grade 3.

But then it was my turn
to be surprised when the
grandmother said
"Yes!"
as long as it was okay
with Aaron.
But when I asked him
he said he'd rather be with
his mom
or go on the trip
with his grandma.

aaron

we went into the back
area
the place where
Mrs. H has her desk.
the chair's too big.
my feet don't reach the
floor.
i know grandma is going
to Blue River
i want to go too.
i don't want
to stay
at my teacher's.
okay, then i'll stay
with my dad.
i have a new sister.
her name is Lily.
i can help look after her.
until grandma gets
back.

November 13

Gale

When Sadie came in
with those too-small snow
pants
I thought I would cry.
To stop myself I turned
and got her a new pair.
I keep a big bag of second
hand clothes in the back.
Jeanette helped me collect
them.
They're for Sadie.
I've given her a few things
already
But if I give them all to
her at once I worry what
her mom will think,
what she might say.
Will she get angry again
at the school
for interfering?
Or will she understand
that I really am trying to
be caring.
Maybe if I just give Sadie
a piece or two at a time
it won't seem like such a
big deal.
At least Sadie will be
warm outside
now.

sadie

Marni noticed my bare
feet. where are your
socks? she said.
told her i like
bare feet and
besides
i couldn't find my sock.
one was under my desk
but i don't know where
the other one was.

did she see my too small
up to my ankles snow
pants?
at least they're pink
i said i didn't want
to wear them
out to recess
it's not that cold outside
i have my favourite
shirt
to keep me warm. i
painted it
myself.
pink is my favourite
colour. so i used
lots of pink.
i wore my snow pants
outside
Seeta helped me tug my
pants out
at the
bottom
to keep my ankles
warm. and she put her
arm around me so i put
my arm around her.
we're best friends you
know.
but later,
i didn't want to wear my
pants outside again
i told teacher i wasn't
cold
and the pants
didn't fit
anyways.
she gave me a new pair
said i could have
them
Seeta and me laughed
when i put them on. i look
goofy i said
cuz
they came up to
my armpits
when i pulled them up
but Seeta pulled them
back down
around my waist
and i wore them outside
but at home time i left
them
on top of my cubby
and wore
my too small ones
home.

November 14

Gale

On a report card
what does acceptable
mean
to parents?
Do they see the anguish I
put into every word I write
about their child?
Or do they only see the
word
acceptable
and turn it into a mark?
At least this year I can
talk to parents before the
report cards go home.
But what happens when
some parents
don't come?
Like Sadie's
or Aaron's?
How do I say their work
isn't even
acceptable?

sadie

reading test
the
and
me
i knew some but
not all.
i hope it's enough.

November 20

Gale

It happened after all.
Someone came with
Aaron yesterday
to pick up his books
and indoor shoes.
But I couldn't let him
take his books because the
office said
his mom hasn't paid,
she hasn't paid,
Aaron's school fees.
And they still have some
overdue library books.
So I could only give them
his indoor shoes.
It didn't feel right.

Aaron didn't even hug
me
goodbye.

aaron

Eric and me went to pick
up my school stuff.
i'm not going back.
we got my books and
my shoes
and my red backpack
with my name on it.
my mom wrote it in
black marker.
Aaron Tyler Potvin –
that's my dad's name.
i'm not going back.
i'm going to a new place
to live with my mom
and Kassidy and
Tristen. Eric too,
my mom's having a new
baby.
i don't know about
school there. maybe.
i don't really care.
i'll have a new baby
to help take care of.

November 26

Gale

I had to send the student teacher,
Miss B,
to look for Sadie and Seeta
after recess.
They were late
and not just a few minutes
but late late, like 10 minutes or more
and I was getting worried.
So I sent Miss B out
and she found them in the boot room
taking off their outdoor shoes.
When I saw them I tried to explain
why I was so .
worried.
Seeta listened and said she understood
and apologized before she sat down.
But Sadie -
well Sadie wouldn't even come talk to me.
She just lay down on the carpet
and covered her ears
first with her hands,
then with her coat.
I told her if she wouldn't talk to me about it
she'd get a walking card
and have to spend some recesses
walking with the supervisors
and talking about safety.

But still she
wouldn't listen.

I ended up carrying
Sadie
to the office
part-way
until she was ready to walk on her own.
I needed Jeanette to talk to her,
I had a class to teach,
and I was so exhausted.

sadie

late from recess
me and Seeta were
in the boot room. teacher
was mad.
i didn't want to listen
to her covered my
ears.
can't hear you. can't hear
you.
got sent to the office
anyway.
got carried cause i didn't
want to go.
no no no no no
no
dumb walking card.
stupid walking card.
how come
Seeta didn't get
one?
but maybe she'll walk
with me anyway.

December 18

Gale

Time is passing by
so quickly.
Each morning
we all meet in the gym
for Christmas carols.
There's no time
to finish
all our projects.
I keep thinking about
Aaron.
He's still not here.
I wonder if he's really
coming back...

sadie

Seeta gave me a candy
cane
then me and her made a
present
for the class
on the whiteboard, the
one with wheels.
an alphabet story.
a is for
angel.
we did most of the
letters but some were
hard.
teacher said we couldn't
share
cuz we weren't good
listeners
when others shared.
so i erased it
what me and Seeta had
done.

January 6

Gale

Aaron didn't show up
even though we thought
he would.
His chair is still on his
desk.
I wonder if I should
remove his desk
so the kids stop asking
and I stop wondering.

"How did you spend your
break?"
I asked the kids to tell me
in their
writer's notebook.
Sadie talked about
going to Disneyland
but somehow I know
that's not
true.
But I didn't know how to
respond.

Marni called Aaron's
grandmother
to find out what was up.
I guess Aaron's mom and
step-dad separated
and Karen moved back
to the settlement
to be with family.
Karen doesn't seem to
want the school
to care for her
or Aaron.
There's not much we can
do
if she won't let us in.

sadie

i have a new scrape
on my leg, just above the
ankle
i went skating
over the holidays
on my new skates
i can flip flip
somersault
i'm better than everyone.
i am.

i like to put my arm
around Seeta
when it's fitness time
we hold each other
up when we have to try
to balance
some time
we let go
and fall.
and laugh.

January 27

sadie

i like my new seat
right up front.
my hands were cold at
recess
no mitts today, same as
Seeta.
we found some in the lost
and found
it was hard to find a
matching pair
for me and Seeta.

aaron

mom was mad
cuz
i didn't get the walks
shovelled.
she talked to Marni
about
me going back
to school
or maybe
learning at home
instead.
says she got beat up in
school before.
not me.
no one beats me up.

still
i'd rather learn
at home
then i can hang out
with
Jess.

January 30

Gale

Seeta gave Sadie a
granola bar.
I wonder if she brings
extra food
on purpose
so she can share with her
friend.
Mami told me Aaron's
back in town
but still not registered in
a school.
I wonder if I have a legal
responsibility
to call the truancy officer.
But that seems so harsh
so un-caring.
But I'm not sure anymore
what the caring thing is
here.
And Aaron never really
left a space for me
to care for him.
It's not as easy as
bringing a granola bar
for a hungry friend.

sadie

teacher said i had
an awesome morning.
i smiled and
said uh-huh.
i like awesome.

February 3

sadie

Seeta and i shovelled
snow
at the front of the
school.
where the teachers come
and the parents
sometimes
Sarah came too
but she didn't know
where
the shovels were
or how to do it.
Seeta and i
showed her how.

February 14

Gale

Aaron showed up
this afternoon, with a
basket of strawberries
for our fruit salad.
He brought his
Auntie Jess too.
They were both so quiet
barely moving from their
chairs all afternoon.
But everyone was so
excited to see Aaron.
They all wanted to rub
his head.
His mom had shaved it he
told us
due to lice.
But no one seemed to care.
I did feel a little itchy for
a while though.

sadie

Aaron's back!
his head is shaved he
said
cuz he had lice.
he let me touch it. cool.
he gave me a valentine's
card
i put it in my folder.
it was
a good day.

aaron

Jessica came with me.
Mrs. Stuart was in the
office. she gave me a
hug – even Jessica.
i remember where my
boots go.
my desk is still there
too.
Jessica helped me put
my stuff away.
and my valentine cards.
Marni brought them for
me and helped me write
everyone's names.
i put them in the
mailboxes. there was
even one with my name
on it. had some in it
already.
some candy
hearts too.

we got there before the
bell rang. everyone
shouted when they saw
me
and started rubbing my
head.
my mom shaved it
cause i got lice.
Marni asked if i liked
being back.
it's good.
i missed Mrs. H.

February 20

Gale

They were incredible at
the assembly today
and so proud
of themselves.
I heard Aaron rush up to
Marni and shout
"You should have come
earlier. We were in the
gym and everyone was
there and we got to sing a
song. The one 'Use Your
Words', you know, and
you could have heard us."
He was right
to be proud.

aaron

me and Troy have the
same shoes except mine
are bigger.

at meeting time
everyone was bugging
me, trying to sit beside
me and get me in
trouble.
but i want to do the
right thing.
i want Mrs. H to see that
i can be good.

i used one of my new
notebooks and wrote
Frm Aaron.
To Mrne.
i drew a picture of us
walking on the sidewalk
in front of my house.
told her she could write
back to me too.

February 25

Gale

I'm really not sure
what to do
with Seeta and Sadie
anymore.
They're just constantly
getting into trouble.
Leaving the school
grounds,
being disrespectful to our
student teacher.
I wonder if Marni will
talk to them for me.

sadie

i wasn't really going to
leave the school.
i was just
joking.
but Seeta told
and now i have to eat my
lunch in the office
and have a walking card
at recess.

February 26

Gale

Aaron was late again today
and I'm finding his behaviour
more challenging again,
kind of like it was in the fall.

sadie

it's my turn to do my family presentation today.
i brought pictures from home
i liked it when everyone asked me questions.
do i have a dog?
what is my mom's name?
what do i like to eat?
i got to tell the answers
it was kind of like being a teacher.
cool.

aaron

my uncle's at my house.
he borrowed my mitts
to do the shovelling
so now i don't
have any for recess.
Mrs. H noticed.
said to go to the
lost and found.
but I want my own.

my grandpa came too
but his truck broke down.
he's already gone back to Blue River.
he's good at fixing things
me too.
i help him sometimes.
mom wouldn't let me go with him.
too bad.

March 6

Gale

I was hoping today I
would finally get to meet
Sadie's mom.
Sadie was in the office
on an in-school
suspension and she was
coughing so much
that the secretary
called her mom
at work
saying Sadie would be
better off home in bed.
Diane was mad,
being pulled away from
work.
She never did come down
to the classroom.
She just sent Sadie to get
her backpack
and coat.
I hope Sadie
doesn't get in trouble for
this.

sadie

i didn't want them to
but they called my mom
anyways.
i knew she'd be mad.
she had to come get me.
left work and everything.
i was coughing in the
office.
i was only there cuz i
wasn't allowed to stay in
the classroom.
Seeta and i were in
trouble again.
teacher wouldn't have
called mom. she'd a known
not to.
Marni helped me get my
stuff.
she met my mom.
see
they do look alike
blonde hair and
blue eyes. told ya.
i knew mom would be mad
at the school. stupid
school.
we might be moving
to a new school.

aaron

i made a schedule for
me and Marni to do our
writing
so we can keep
track of whose turn it is.
i even put our names
and lines to make it
easier.

i got in trouble for
fighting after school.
but these two big kids
always chase me and
push me in the
snowbanks
and try to beat
me up.
so i gave one a
bloody nose. but i didn't
mean it.

March 14

Gale

"Love You Forever"
I think it's one of my
favourite books.
It's still hard to read
without crying.
Sadie held on to my legs
as I read and Benjamin
rocked her shoulders
during the refrain.
"I'll love you forever
I'll like you for always
As long as I'm living
My baby you'll be."
They're all still
such babies.
Yet some have to grow up
so fast.

sadie

i can write now
and read some
school's okay.
maybe i'll be a principal
like Mrs. Stuart.
i'll have lots of teddy
bears too. i already have
a stuffed bunny.
it's white.
from my brother Travis.
Sarah says she has one
too
only hers is pink.

aaron

i told Mrs. H i like
my desk at the back
of the room
i can see everything
better
you know, i'm really,
really good at drawing
and reading and writing.
before i couldn't write
and now i know how to
really good
and i know how to read
more than ever.
i'm supposed to be in
Grade 3 but i'm in
Grade 2. so?
i know when kids are my
friends -
when they play with me.
when they don't they're
not my friends.
like Terry used to be my
friend but now he's not.
now Bradley's my friend.
i like going to his house
after school. his mom
gives me scooby-doo
snacks and once
she gave me a pair of
gloves and a scarf.
it's really fun at his
house.
i like being with bigger
kids. they look out for
me, like i look out for
Chandra.
if anything ever happens
to him i'll look out for
him. he's really, really
small and when kids
throw him in the snow i
can protect him.

March 17

Gale

I had shamrocks for the
children who forgot
to wear green
but Shayne preferred to
get pinches
instead
or so he said.
Sadie's hair was curled
today.
She looked nice.
She said her mom did it
"just for fun."
All day she tossed her
head, I think just to feel
the bounce
of the curls.

Marni shared that Aaron
told her he was going to
Blue River
tomorrow
just for a visit
and he'd be gone for a
couple of weeks.
Why didn't he tell me
himself?
I can't help but wonder
if he'll really come back,
and why can't they wait
just one more week
when it's spring break
or even three days
then Aaron can get his
report card
and come to the
celebration of learning.
These are important
moments
in a student's life at
school
and Aaron always seems
to miss out.

sadie

no one could pinch me
cuz
teacher gave me a green
shamrock
to pin on my pink shirt.
and i had a pink ribbon
cuz mom did my hair
it's all curly and i like it.

but me and Sarah
pinched Marni
when she came
cuz she forgot to wear
green
today.
til she put on a shamrock
too

aaron

i'm wearing green so i
don't get pinched.
but i'm going to Blue
River in a couple of days
- for a week.
Mom said she's bored
and
she wants to go see my
grandma.
i get to sleep in the
living room – the couch
is really soft.
sometimes me and Jess
make a tent on the
floor.
i told Bradley and
Chandra
but i forgot to
tell Mrs. H.

my mom doesn't like
coming to school to see
my work.
she doesn't like getting
up early and getting
ready to come.
but she's really happy
because i know how to
write and read and
colour.
if she came i'd show her
all the stuff in my desk
and how good i was.
but she has to watch
my brother
and sister.

April 16

Gale

Aaron still hasn't come
back.
And he's not in school in
Blue River,
Marni says.
I've been thinking I
should call
Social Services.
He is truant after all
and I have a
responsibility.
But that feels so harsh.
It's just
I don't know what to do.
I want him in school,
I don't want him out there
drifting
getting lost in the system
getting forgotten.
But I can't bring myself
to call.
Think I'll wait awhile.

aaron

my uncle shot a deer.
he skinned and gutted it
in the bush.
i got to see it when he
brought it home.
it was cool.
he said i can help next
time
when i'm older.

May 5

Gale

Sadie's passport had
Meadowview School
written on it
in her mother's writing.
I guess she really won't be
back
next year
after all.

sadie

Marni and me got to
make the chicken soup
today
teacher asked us too.
first
i wiped the desks
then
i opened the cans and
i got to stir the soup.
i wish there was enough
for seconds.

i like this school even
though
mom says
this school is nonsense
and the teachers are
bossy.

i brought my passport
back
i'm going to a new school
next year
with Travis and Daniel
for real.

aaron

i get a hot lunch every
day at school now.
there's 4 boys and 5
girls in my class.
we get candy for being
good.
Jessica doesn't come
with me
but i get to see
her after school.
the puddles are all gone
now.
soon we can hunt
for snakes.
me and Jess.

May 11

Gale

Aaron's not coming back.
He's in a new school
on the settlement
now.
The kids asked about him
when the achievement
tests arrived –
they read his name on
one of the forms.
I told them he wouldn't be
back
this year.
Bradley didn't say a
word.
He just looked down at
his desk.

May 14

Gale

Sadie drew the most
amazing skies
in her picture.
We went for a ravine
walk
so I asked the kids to
draw things they had
seen
living and non-living
and things they had
heard.
Sadie was working so
hard
and even came and asked
if I would tell Jonathan
and Samar ~~to be quiet~~
because their talking
was making it hard for
her to work.

sadie

some kids were talking
and i couldn't do my
pictures
flowers and ducks and
trees and bugs
we did a ravine walk and
i'm drawing the pictures
i asked teacher to make
them stop talking
so i could draw.

May 29

Gale

The kids have been doing puppet plays in Exploration time, mainly Theo and Seeta - sometimes Michael joins in.
Sadie is more of an observer now - or cheerleader even.
She asked for their autographs at the end.
It was a play about Friendship.
Later she drew a picture on the whiteboard of a sunset.
Sarah had shown her how to draw one a few days ago
and she's been practicing ever since.
She asked if she could show it to the class.
"Last summer I saw a sunset," she said,
"and now I can draw what I saw."

sadie

sarah showed me how to draw sunsets
last summer i saw one
i drew a sunset for the class
on the white board
and teacher let me share it
i'm good at sunsets.

Karen, aaron's mom

You know,
Aaron can read so much better now.
At Ravine they sent nothing home for him
like reading materials and other things to practice.
Here they help him right.
Every day he gets homework
and I like that. Then I can help him.
I never could at that other school.

I think he feels that he belongs more here.
Probably because everyone's the same colour.
He's learning Cree like I did when I was in school.
But I didn't like it. It's something the old people speak.
Not me.
Aaron?
I think maybe he likes it.
I'm not sure.

June 5

Gale

Sadie forgot her lunch
today
and I remembered her
mom getting mad
last time
when the lunch room
supervisor gave her a
hotdog
and then sent home a bill
- a dollar and fifty cents.
Sadie said her mom
called us "bossy"
and that we "interfere too
much."
I wonder if that's why
they're moving schools.
So today
when Sadie said she
forgot her lunch
I took her to her brother
to see if he had a lunch
to share.
He did.
At least her mom won't
get mad again.

sadie

i had lunch with Travis
my brother
today
he came to my room
and sat at my desk
and shared his chef boy
ar dee.
i didn't bring any lunch
today.
Travis even gave me a
candy
when we were done.
he's my big brother.

June 13

Gale

Shelby began to cry
while cleaning out her
desk.
Theo took her brown
crayon
she said.
I couldn't understand
why this would make her
so sad
until she said,
"It was from Aaron"
and
"It's the only thing I have
to remember him by."
I hugged her
then Theo and I
helped her look
for the brown crayon
that was a gift
from Aaron.

June 19

Gale

Sadie and Seeta have
drifted apart.
Now Sadie seems to
follow Sarah's
lead.
Today they played
hopscotch and dominoes
And when Seeta joined in
she tried bossing Sadie
around.
When Seeta pretended her
dominoes were cars
Sadie pretended her
dominoes were cars
But at clean-up
She helped Sarah instead.

sadie

me and Sarah played
hopscotch.
it comes from England
or France
or maybe China. can't
remember.
we're using markers for
rocks
cuz there aren't any
rocks in the
classroom.
we played dominoes too.
even Seeta.
but Seeta was kind of
bossy.
she pretended her
dominoes were cars and
she drove them around
the table.
it was kind of fun.

June 24

sadie

i want to write a note
cuz i'm leaving for a new
school.
good-bye to everybody in
the entire school,
i'd say.
i'll miss you
you're the best kids
ever.
the teachers are, all over
the world, you're the
best
and you guys are doing
your best work.
and that's good
and i'd ask teacher to
help me read it
at the assembly
in front of everyone
cuz it's to the whole
school.

June 27

Gale

That's it?
Already?
Every year it's hard to
say good-bye
and this year
is no different.
I'm so tired.
But still
I can't believe
another year has gone by.

Chapter 5

Sadie's Stories: Finding a Place in the Classroom Community

Sadie was six years old when I first met her in Gale's classroom. She was one of the year one students in a combined year one-two classroom of 25 children. Sadie started to appear in my [redacted] during my first visit after school had officially begun.

> Sadie started to eat her sandwich during snack time until Gale asked her to keep it for lunch and take something else out instead. Sadie laughed, burped, and continued eating the sandwich. (Field note, September 4, 2002)

She appeared again the following week.

> Sadie brought me a picture today just as I was leaving. "We are walking to school at recess. You are here and I am here and Deon is here," she told me as I scribed her words. When I reached down to offer her a hug I was taken aback by the strong smell coming from her unwashed hair. I felt guilty as I quickly pulled away. (Field note, September 11, 2002)

By the middle of September, Sadie had become a dominant presence in the pages of my field notes. I worried at first that by noticing her unwashed hair, her dirty clothes, her burping, and other inappropriate behaviour, I was signalling a dislike of her. Why else would I write these comments? And why did I hesitate writing observations like that down? I wondered what I was coming to know, not only about Sadie, but about myself through these field notes. I also began to wonder about the story of community being negotiated in the classroom and Sadie's place in that community. By the middle of October Sadie had become a participant in my research.

This chapter tells an unfolding story of Sadie's desire to find a place for herself in the classroom story. It tells also of the power of the school story in shaping Sadie's story of belonging and becoming. In the two early field notes recounted above, I learned that Sadie was struggling with what it meant to be a student at school.

Following the work of Paley (1986; 1981; 1990; 1997), this chapter is interwoven with Sadie's stories of her unfolding life in a year one-two classroom. Classrooms are places where stories are lived and told. They are also places where stories and lives are shaped. This chapter tells Sadie's stories, filtered through my eyes and my knowing, of her experiences. The stories attend to who she is and who she is becoming as a member of the Ravine School community. There were moments of tension in her unfolding story and it was by inquiring into these moments that I was able to attend to the places where Sadie's story to live by bumped up against stories of school and her teacher's story to live by. Over time, Sadie learned to live and tell a school story of herself, a story that is nested within the larger story of what it means to be a successful student in school. During the school year I watched as Sadie shifted away from being the student who "laughed, burped, and continued eating [her] sandwich" (Field note, September 4, 2002) on the first day of school into a student who shovelled snow off the front walks and learned to draw cats and sunsets. But this shift took place gradually and is understood only by telling and retelling Sadie's stories and stories of Sadie.

Sadie

I met Sadie on the first day of school and came to know her life stories over the course of her year in Grade 1. As I worked alongside Sadie in the classroom she told

stories of living with her two older brothers and her mother in a town-home complex on the other side of the city from where she attended school. Her mother, divorced from Sadie's father, worked on a factory floor not far from where the school was located. Sadie and her brothers attended a local daycare, one they had attended for many years. Ravine had been the only school all three children had ever attended (Field note, October 24, 2002).

I knew from Sadie's stories that her favourite colour was pink, she loved her two older brothers, she had an aunt and cousin to whom she was close, and that she longed to fit in at school (Transcripts of conversations, November 27, 2002 and December 2002). I knew also from the stories I heard and watched that Sadie's family struggled financially and that her mother had seldom entered the school landscape. Sadie arrived in the classroom that first day already having a good friend from daycare. Seeta was a year older than Sadie and the two were inseparable for much of the year I spent in their classroom.

If You're Happy and You Know It: Moving into Rhythm

> As I walked down the year one-two wing on the first day of school I heard singing coming from Gale's classroom. The children were gathered around their teacher in the meeting area at the back of the room. Together they were singing and doing the actions to "If You're Happy and You Know It" (Unknown copyright). The room was open and uncluttered, the walls waiting for children's work. The desks were arranged in groups of four, each desk decorated with a nametag. As I moved to join the group, one young child caught my attention. Sadie was sitting in the

midst of the group of children. She was just a step behind her classmates in the actions and song. She seemed to be unfamiliar with the song, although she was trying to actively participate. Sadie had long blonde hair with a heavy fringe of bangs. She was small in stature and somewhat unkempt in appearance. As the song was finishing Sadie moved closer to another girl who was sitting at the back of the meeting area. Seeta was a contrast to Sadie in size, colouring, and appearance. She looked older and her clothes, while not new, were clean and tidy. A long dark braid hung down to the small of her back, a style I came to associate with Seeta. Sadie was dressed in faded pink. As Sadie sat down beside her friend she put her head on Seeta's shoulder and fell into a clapping rhythm that more closely matched the rhythm of the other children in the class. I sensed the girls had a friendship that extended beyond the classroom. (Interim field text, based on field note, September 4, 2002)

I puzzled over what I saw and heard that morning in the classroom. When I read the narrative verse I had written about this moment to Sadie at the end of the year, she clapped and sang along as I recalled the song her classmates had been singing. I did not know that first day that much of my life in that year one-two classroom would soon centre on Sadie. Yet Sadie captured my attention immediately. At first glimpse, I saw a young girl who, perceptive of what was happening around her, wanted to fit in with everyone else. I saw a young girl, the only one in the classroom, who did not appear to know the words of a common children's song, yet who tried to find some way to participate, and I saw a young girl who turned to a friend to help her negotiate this tension. As I attended to Sadie's experiences during the morning sing-along, I started to

wonder what she was figuring out about becoming part of this classroom in relationship with others. I wondered also about the response she was receiving to the stories she was living and telling and how these responses helped her imagine a new retelling and reliving of her stories. As I was beginning to learn rhythms of being a researcher in this year one-two classroom I found myself wanting to know more about Sadie who was beginning to learn about life in school.

As I took my field notes and the narrative verse I was composing back to my own community at the Centre, our collaborative conversation turned to the ways children compose their stories to live by in school in relationship with others. I thought about how I often take my wonders back to my Centre friends and how they help me make sense of my experiences. This process of struggling publicly helps me slow down and attend more closely to my experiences and the tensions within those experiences. I thought about Sadie and her friend Seeta and wondered if they too experienced knowing in a relational way (Hollingsworth, 1994).

The first day of school in Gale's classroom was filled with moments of tension—moments where lives intersected and often bumped up against one another. When the children gathered together on the carpet to sing "If You're Happy and You Know It," Sadie was the only child who seemed to have difficulty with the song. She did not know the lyrics and was unable to clap in rhythm. As I watched her look around at her classmates, I sensed Sadie gradually realizing that she was out of step, out of rhythm with her teacher and classmates. My field notes on that first morning captured the way Sadie appeared to awaken to this knowing of herself and solved this problem by moving to sit beside an older friend from daycare. When she did this she appeared to relax, her

clapping immediately improved, and she fell into rhythm with her teacher and classmates. Did the relationship with her friend "help Sadie feel less frantic in what [was] clearly for her a new and uncomfortable experience" (Field note, September 4, 2002)?

Relying on an established relationship with another child, Sadie begins to negotiate her story to live by (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999), who she is, and who she is becoming in school. On her first morning in year one, Sadie did not look to her teacher but to the other children, and more particularly to her friend from daycare. As Sadie momentarily lived through feelings of uncertainty and ambiguity, she reached out to her friend, Seeta, as a way to enter into both the unfolding activity and, possibly, into the classroom context as a child who fit with the rhythms there. Puzzling this through with my research colleagues, I began to wonder if Sadie did not yet see her teacher as the one who knew or as the one to look to for knowledge of how to live in the classroom. Maybe Sadie was used to turning toward her siblings at home and at daycare as sources of knowledge as a way to continually negotiate her story to live by.

My field note captures how Sadie was able to move out of tension independently, although still in a relational manner. There was a bodily negotiation of knowledge occurring with her friend Seeta. Sadie did not choose any other child in class to help her through the tension of not knowing the chosen song; she chose a girl she knew. Early in the year, Sadie often turned to Seeta to help her make sense of her story to live by in school (Field notes, September 4, 2002, September 26, 2002, October 3, 2002, October 17, 2002). At the time of my research, Sadie was in year one and Seeta in year two in the same classroom. For both of them it was their first year working with Gale as their teacher. Relational knowing (Hollingsworth, 1994) was central to how Sadie negotiated

her story in school and found a place in the classroom community. Relational knowing as a way of living alongside others is an active construction of knowledge and therefore is a knowing within the moment based on a shared history with the other. Sadie constructed a narrative of who she was going to be in school relying heavily on the relational. She appeared to bring all of her knowing that lives in her body to try to compose who she was going to be in school. The moment of singing was the first recognition that Sadie was experiencing herself as a *not-knower* (Vinz, 1997) on this in-classroom place on the school landscape. She seemed uncertain of her story to live by on this place. This was a moment of tension for Sadie, a moment when her story to live by as a child who fits in was momentarily interrupted by a new story of becoming a child who does not fit, who does not know the rhythm of the classroom. Searching for a way to lessen the tension she joined her friend, Seeta, at the back of the group. There was a sense of agency in Sadie's action. This was the beginning of relational knowing as a way to continue to be able to live out her story of fitting in.

Keep It for Lunch

Later that first morning, just prior to the recess break, the children were invited to eat their snacks as they watched the morning announcements on the in-school televised news network. This moment is captured in the field note that opens this chapter and is repeated below.

> Sadie started to eat her sandwich during snack time until Gale asked her to keep it for lunch and take something else out instead. Sadie laughed, burped, and continued eating the sandwich. (Field note, September 4, 2002)

In this moment Gale tried to help Sadie know the rhythm of what and when to eat in school. For Sadie, eating her sandwich instead of the apple in her lunch bag, as suggested by her teacher, was an expression of her bodily knowing. She had not had breakfast for several hours, having been at daycare prior to coming to school, and she knew an apple would not appease her hunger. Continuing to eat the sandwich suggests that Gale's comment did not make sense to her. In this moment Sadie was still not aware that there was a story of snack in the classroom. Nor was she aware yet of the teacher's position as the one who knows in the classroom. Rereading my field notes now brings forward a new memory, a wonder that was not captured in my notes of that day. I remember wondering at the time if Sadie's laughing and burping was a form of resistance to the imposition of her teacher's knowledge around snacks in school. Now as I revisit this moment almost two years later, I begin to understand it more as an expression of wanting to maintain narrative coherence in Sadie's story to live by. Carr (1986) wrote "coherence seems to be a need imposed on us whether we seek it or not. Things need to make sense. We feel the lack of sense when it goes missing" (p. 97). Perhaps Sadie was searching for a way to make sense. She was responding to her bodily knowledge while Gale, her teacher, was trying to help shape Sadie's story of eating in school. As a classroom teacher I can remember similar moments when I suggested to my students that they may wish to save their dessert until after eating their sandwich and/or fruit. As a parent, I talk with my own two children about how to divide their recess snacks and lunch at school. My own prior teaching experiences and my life as a mother help me see Sadie's teacher's action as an expression of care (Noddings, 1984). Gale knew that Sadie had only a sandwich, an apple, and a juice box in her paper lunch bag. She knew that

Sadie would be hungry by lunchtime and would need her sandwich then. Gale was trying to introduce Sadie to the rhythm of the school day, which was different than Sadie's rhythm of her body. I wonder if Sadie had experienced a different rhythm at daycare where snacks were provided for the children in the morning and afternoon. I did not know until later that Sadie was used to eating the food she brought from home in one sitting, at lunch time, at her daycare (Transcript of conversation, February 3, 2003).

I wonder about this interrupting of bodily knowing within the rhythms of the school day. I wonder how recess and lunch breaks shape an understanding of life in school. In my field notes from the first day of school, Sadie does not seem to understand what her teacher is trying to help her know. "Where there is not the vision that permits the understanding of these new connections, then a story cannot be told" (Steedman, 1986, p. 138). Perhaps, because I have no subsequent field notes about eating sandwiches at snack, Sadie learned to eat them at lunch. Perhaps she became a knower of the rhythm of food and recess breaks at school through the response her teacher gave her on this first day. Perhaps this is a new story Sadie lives and tells of herself as fitting in on a classroom landscape.

In these first two moments Sadie is seen as a knower who learns quickly that she is a not-knower, at least in the moment of the early morning song. She does not learn, on this first day, that she is a not-knower about the rhythms of food in school. She does not learn, on this first day, that the teacher is the one who holds knowledge of school. Sadie sees herself and her friend Seeta as the ones who know. Her knowing is connected to her living, and she demonstrates this by moving to sit beside a friend as a way to negotiate a space for herself in the classroom. As Vinz (1997) and Grumet (1988) help me

understand, Sadie's knowing is a moving form, and my field notes and reflections present only a partial understanding of Sadie's life in school. I wonder if Sadie arrived at school that first day seeing herself as a knower but, over time, was dis-positioned (Vinz, 1997) by the story of school, where the teacher is understood as the one who holds knowledge. While Vinz writes of the benefits of teachers moving to a place of "un-knowing" and "not-knowing" in order to make space for vulnerability, ambiguity, and uncertainty (p. 139) I worry that Sadie's experience of "not-knowing" was, at first, an uncomfortable place for her. Maybe by moving into an un-knowing, vulnerable place Sadie was able to move into a new space, a space of knowing the story of school and of finding a place to fit into its community.

Vinz (1991) helps me see that, for teachers, moving to those places of not-knowing and un-knowing helps move us away from stories of certainty around curriculum as a fixed text and helps us attend more deeply to the curriculum of lives, the experiences, that our students bring to the classroom. As I watched Sadie move to that vulnerable place I began to wonder what was happening to her story to live by. I began to see struggles between Sadie's sense of self and her story of community. I wondered how she was attending to her experience of community being lived out in the classroom.

Ravine Walk

> "We're using notebooks today too," Sadie called out as I entered the classroom. Tony told me how the class had gone for a walk in the ravine yesterday and were returning today to do some sketching…Eventually we ended up at a spot near an old, gnarly tree that Gale told the children was her favourite tree in the ravine.

> The children were invited to find a comfortable spot on the ground, take out their writer's notebooks, and sketch what they saw from whatever angle they were sitting. Several times Sadie got up to move closer to the tree but each time Gale asked her to move back so everyone had an unobstructed view…When Sarah didn't respond to Sadie's playful toss of leaves, Seeta picked up her own handful and, catching Sadie's attention, threw them up in the air…On the way back Sadie and Seeta ran ahead of the rest of us but when they sensed they had gone too far they would wander back, only to soon head off again until we all met up at the steps leading out of the ravine. (Field note, October 3, 2002)

This was the first time I had been on an out-of-school outing with the children, and I was interested in how Sadie would respond to the freedom of being beyond the classroom walls. There were no desks to indicate a place for work, and the only direction she was given was to spend time noticing and sketching a tree. I do not know if other children also got up from their spots to move closer to the tree or to touch its rough bark and drooping branches. My field notes show me noticing only Sadie's behaviour. She did not immediately fall to the task of drawing. Instead she would get up and move closer to the tree. At times it appeared almost as if the tree was her dance partner. Sadie would bend and twirl, her arms outstretched like the branches floating above her. Each time her teacher would politely ask Sadie to return to her seat. Several children also called out to Sadie telling her that she was blocking their view. When Sadie finally put pencil to paper she drew only a few lines before she became restless and placed her notebook and pencil on the ground. Picking up leaves scattered on the ground, Sadie playfully threw them at Sarah who gave her a gentle smile but continued on with her own careful drawing. It was

her friend Seeta who picked up Sadie's plotline of play and tossed a handful of leaves in the air. When Gale asked the children to gather up their belongings and begin the walk back to the school, Sadie and Seeta quickly separated from the rest of the group and danced their way back down the path. When they sensed they had gotten too far ahead of the group they would turn around and run back. After a few moments of walking once more with the larger group they would quickly dance ahead again. Through her actions on the path and near the tree, Sadie seemed to be telling me that she understood the space outside of school to be for play. However, this knowing was challenged by her teacher, Gale, who kept asking her to sit and draw quietly and her classmate Sarah who did not respond when Sadie gently threw leaves her way. Once again, Seeta helped Sadie negotiate a place for herself in the story of the ravine walk when she picked up her own pile of leaves and when she joined her friend in skipping and dancing ahead of the larger group.

I was struck by how Sadie tried to hold onto her knowing of outside school as a place of play. When the response she received from her teacher and some of her classmates tried to shift this knowing it was her friend Seeta who gave her back control of her own story. Seeta seemed to encourage Sadie to hold onto her story to live by. Again, she depended on her relationship with Seeta to help her continue to negotiate narrative coherence, in this case, that play had a place in her life at school.

Just Like Teacher

Early in the year, Sadie's story shifted as she began to situate the teacher as the one who knows, the one she should look to when she experienced not-knowing. Sadie

began to construct a story of her place in school based on her early experiences in the classroom. She watched what other children were doing and was shaped by her desire to be "just like teacher" (Field note, October 28, 2002). Not only did Sadie begin to recognize Gale, her teacher, as the one who knew, she also began to name Gale as the one she should look to when she realized she was not in rhythm with the stories of school.

Sadie's experience in year one was also shaped by her involvement in my research. In attending to my own lived experiences at the school, I began to see how I also became a character in Sadie's story of school, a character that at times interrupted the story she was trying to live out in the classroom.

> Sadie greeted me with a hug this morning—jumping into my arms as I walked through the door after lunch. "Can I write in your notebook?" she excitedly asked as soon as she saw the familiar book in my hand. She was very careful and deliberate in her work and I told her how much I liked her printing. I was worried, though, that I was keeping Gale from starting her lesson. I think Sadie sensed this too when she quickly ended our conversation and moved back to her seat. I wish I didn't have to always arrive after the day had already started …
>
> Gale shared a story from her weekend. Mondays were a day for writing in their notebooks and sharing stories of their lives. Gale printed her story out on the overhead for the children to read. She talked about a cat so she drew one on the overhead. The children were then asked to compose their own stories about their adventures on the weekend. Many children told their stories in picture form. Sadie's desk was situated right beside the overhead. I noticed immediately that

her picture matched the one that Gale drew. "I tried hard to be neat… It's just like teacher's," she told me as I knelt beside her desk…

Later that day, the children returned to their desks after gym class to prepare for home time. It was unusual for me to spend an entire day at the school and I was feeling tired. It felt like it had been a long day. Sadie was the only one who did not return to her seat when requested. Instead she moved over to the meeting area at the back of the room and lay down. Several times I watched her look towards Gale. When Gale did not respond, Sadie continued to lie on the carpet. (Interim field text, based on field note, October 28, 2002)

My field note begins by recalling an exuberant greeting that Sadie shared with me when I entered the classroom just prior to the introduction of a new lesson. I do not recall what the other children were doing but I sense they were turned in their seats also calling out hello, something they typically did and is recorded in other field note entries. Yet on this day Sadie was the only one who left her seat. Seeing my notebook and knowing that I used it to capture moments from my time in the classroom, Sadie asked if she could also write in my book. At that point in the school year Sadie was only able to print her name and she did so very carefully and deliberately in my notebook. She was pleased when I commented on her neat printing. Was Sadie showing me that she knew being able to write her name neatly was something expected of students in the classroom? Or was she showing me how she understood my notebook was an important part of my own experience in the classroom? Just before my arrival Sadie had been sitting at her desk waiting to begin a new activity. Seeing me, she acted on her bodily knowing as she immediately leapt from her seat to give me a hug. For a few moments she was lost in her

happiness at seeing me. Then, upon recognizing that other children had remained seated, she quietly returned to her desk. I wonder if my arrival caused a momentary interruption for her in the story she was trying to live out at school. Sadie knew that students were expected to stay in their seats when the teacher was ready to begin a new lesson. Did she experience me as part of her school experience, but not really part of her story of school? Is that what allowed her to fall in and out of the story she was trying to live at school? I wonder now, from this fixed point in time, if the relationship we shared in those beginning months was a conflicting story (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995) for Sadie. Over the first few months, Sadie came to know that during many of my visits we would make time for a one-on-one conversation. She enjoyed our time together and her greeting was her way of letting me know this. Her quiet return to her seat suggests that Sadie recognized that bursting out of her seat might not have been an appropriate action. I experienced a conflict of my own when I entered the classroom that day. My field notes capture my own discomfort at interrupting the beginning of a new lesson. From my own teaching experience I understood the rhythm of the school day. Yet, Gale, the classroom teacher, never once commented on my late entries. In fact, she understood that my late arrivals were due to my competing story (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995) as a working mother. Often I needed to settle my own children in their dayhome and school before coming to Ravine. Other times I needed to first attend to other responsibilities at work. It was the tension I experienced about arriving late that helped me stop and attend to the tension Sadie was experiencing as she quietly returned to her seat after our greeting.

There are other tensions captured in this October field note that also suggest that Sadie did not trust her own knowing. While other children wrote and drew about

moments from their weekend experiences, Sadie chose to copy the cat her teacher had drawn on the overhead. Perhaps she was unsure of her abilities as a writer, a printer, or drawer. Perhaps she felt her stories of her weekend experiences did not fit nicely alongside her teacher's or classmates' stories. Sadie appears to once again dis-position herself as a knower in at least two ways. In the first way, she experiences herself as a not-knower when she merely copies her teacher's cat instead of composing something from her weekend. In the second way, Sadie appears to not trust the rhythm of her stories to live by, that what she knows outside of school would be valued in her classroom place. This place of not-knowing seems to continue to be an uncomfortable place for Sadie. I began to wonder if she imagined there was a correct way of behaving and working in the classroom. In this moment, Sadie did not appear to reach out to a friend as a way to help her fit with her teacher's story of children writing about their weekend. By copying her teacher's picture of a cat, Sadie repositioned herself as knower alongside her teacher. She seemed to be saying that she understood her teacher's knowledge as the knowledge that counted in the classroom. This was an important shift in her story. I wondered if this was helping her find a place to fit in, to be seen as a child who knows in her teacher's eyes.

However, in the afternoon there seemed to be another struggle between Sadie's sense of self and her story of how to fit in to the classroom story. It was also less clear if Sadie knew that Gale was the one who held the knowledge in the classroom. Sadie chose, by lying down in the carpet area, to again follow her own bodily knowing. She was tired from the long day and from the recent gym class. She did not return to her desk as requested by her teacher, but instead moved to a spot on the carpet in the back of the room. I wondered, when I observe Sadie's glances at Gale, if Sadie knew that Gale's

knowledge was the knowledge that counted, but the knowing of her body was what she needed to attend to in that moment, as it was in her decision to greet me with a running hug in the morning. I wonder how tiring it might be for Sadie to learn this new story of being a student in school, a student who is beginning not to trust her own story to live by as she constantly attends to the stories that structure school in this classroom. Sadie's story, as lived out in the classroom, was often in tension with the story of school. Possibly one way to think about this is that the story of school is shaping Sadie's story to live by. Another way might be to suggest that Sadie is continually negotiating a place for her story in the classroom and that she experiences fitting in as a diverse and unfolding process.

I'm Wearing the Clothes She Wants Me To Wear

> Sadie was wearing some clothes I had never seen before. "I'm wearing the clothes she wants me to wear," she told me when I commented on her new outfit. I bent down to ask her more about this but we were interrupted by [the morning announcements]. Gale told me later that the outfit had come from a selection of clothes she had sent home earlier. Gale had made a comment to Jeanette one day about Sadie's wardrobe, about how her clothes were often well worn and ill fitting. Sadie tended to wear the same clothes over and over again. Somehow Jeanette ended up gathering some second-hand clothing from a parent who had older children in the school and gave the bag to Gale to be sent home with Sadie. When I asked Gale what sense Sadie's mother might make of this "gift" she told me that Sadie had been given clothes from the school in the past. This time

> though, Gale planned to send just a few articles of clothing home at a time with Sadie. I wonder if this "indirect and ongoing giving" might make things easier or harder on Mom. Then again, maybe she would simply be glad to have some new clothes for her daughter. Somehow though, I can't help feeling like this is a slightly shaming act. (Field Note, October 24, 2002)

I wondered what sense Sadie made of the gift of a bag of second-hand clothes. The smile on her face when she showed me her new clothes seemed to indicate that she liked and was proud of what she was wearing. The experience of being given clothes was a positive one for her. The clothes she had selected on this day were pink, a colour that was familiar and comforting to Sadie. She had a story of herself as the girl that wears pink and these new clothes allowed her to continue this thread in her identity. Sadie's teacher and principal also had a story of Sadie as the girl who wears pink and the choice of clothes given to Sadie reflected this knowing. Yet Sadie's words to me, "I'm wearing the clothes she wants me to wear," made me stop and pause (Field note, October 24, 2002). By wearing the clothes given to her by her teacher, as opposed to clothes coming from her mother, I wondered what tensions Sadie might be experiencing.

I discovered that this was not the first time that clothes had been collected and given to Sadie. There was a story of community in the school where families often shared what they no longer needed. Food items, extra school supplies, and gently used clothing were often turned in to the office to be shared with others in the school community or to be given to charity. The school story of Sadie was that she had two older brothers and did not like to wear their hand-me downs, nor did their mother often have money for new clothes. When Sadie's mother had placed an order for hooded sweatshirts with the school

logo for her two older boys, the cheque did not clear the bank (Field note, October 24, 2002). The school principal did not try to collect the funds as she knew this would be difficult for the mother, and quietly allowed the boys to keep their sweatshirts. She knew that, for the boys, having a "hoodie" with the school logo allowed them to fit in with their friends. This gift of the sweatshirts was another part of the story of community at the school. The principal, and Sadie's teacher, also wanted to help Sadie fit in and so together they arranged for a gift of gently used clothing. Their gift was a response to Sadie regarding the clothes she typically wore to school, clothes that were often stained or too small, clothes that made Sadie stand out from her classmates. Sadie's comment, "I'm wearing the clothes she wants me to wear," indicated that Sadie was still trying to figure out how to be a know-er at school but accepted, and possibly even welcomed, the story that was being shaped for her.

In this moment of the gift of clothing I also wondered about how the story was being lived out at home. Did Sadie's comment to me suggest that her mother did not want her wearing this new clothing? What story was being told of Sadie's mother by the school through the bag of clothing sent home? How did Sadie's mother experience this donation for her daughter? I was left with these wonders as I was never able to negotiate a relationship with Sadie's mother. Sadie's mother seldom entered the school landscape and I was told that she typically did not return phone calls or respond to notes or letters from school (Field note, October 24, 2002).

By inquiring into this moment I see the tensions around multiple experiences of community in a classroom. Sadie's teacher recognized that Sadie's clothes were often stained or too small and worried how this positioned Sadie amongst the other children in

the classroom and school. Sadie's teacher and principal also recognized that Sadie's mother was likely unable to purchase new clothing for Sadie and by gathering up gently used donated clothing and sending home a few pieces at a time, they recognized the complexity in trying to negotiate a story of community with Sadie and her mother. However, my field note captures my wonder around how this moment of the clothing going home positioned both Sadie and her mother in the story of community being shaped by the school. I wonder now, in the unpacking of this moment, how this gift of clothing positioned Sadie not only in relation to the others in the classroom but in relation to her mother at home. This plotline of tension in relation to clothing at school is carried through another moment captured in my research notebook.

Snowpants

> The children were getting ready for morning recess as I re-entered the room. Sadie was pulling on a pair of snowpants that were clearly too small for her. Seeta was by her side. Sadie's feet were bare and when I asked her where her socks were, she said she couldn't find them. Trying to be helpful, I found one under her desk. Seeta found the other in the boot room. Still hesitant to go outside, Sadie told me, "I don't want to wear my snowpants… It's not that cold outside… I have my favourite shirt to keep me warm. I painted it myself. Pink is my favourite colour so I used lots of pink." Seeta helped her friend pull her jeans out the bottom of the snowpants to cover her ankles. Putting their arms around each other they went out to play… After lunch when the children were being sent outside once more, Gale noticed that Sadie was preparing to go without her snow pants

and asked her to put them on, saying, "It's cold outside and you need to be wearing your snowpants." Sadie replied, "I'm not cold… and the pants don't fit anyways." Turning to me, Sadie pleaded, "Don't make me wear them." Gale moved to her desk and reached down into a bag of second-hand clothing she had been keeping aside for Sadie. She pulled out a pair of snowpants several sizes larger than Sadie's pink ones. She told Sadie they were hers to keep. Seeta helped her friend put them on and they laughed together when they noticed how large they were. "I look goofy," Sadie said as she pulled the snowpants up to her armpits. Seeta helped her pull them down around her waist and Sadie wore them outside… At the end of the day Sadie wore her too-small pink snowpants home, the second-hand ones from her teacher left behind in her cubby. (Interim field text, based on field note, November 13, 2002)

In this field note, Sadie seemed to know that her too-small dark pink snowpants were not acceptable clothing for school. Although she had arrived at school wearing those snowpants she was obviously uncomfortable wearing them around her classmates. Sadie first showed her knowing, the story she planned to live, when she resisted going out for recess by losing her socks. When I did not pick up on this story and began to look for her socks Sadie told me she did not want to wear the snowpants at all. When the plotline in the story she was planning to live out was interrupted, Sadie once again turned to her knowing of a relational plotline. She knew and trusted that her friend, Seeta, would make it possible for her to go outside wearing the too-small snowpants. By wrapping her arms around Seeta, Sadie had a visible way of showing the other children that she fit in, that she had a story to live by during recess. I wondered what happened while Sadie was

outside during morning recess, because by lunchtime she would not wear the too-small snowpants again. By pleading with me, "Don't make me wear them," Sadie hoped that I might intercede with Gale on her behalf. Again it was her friendship with Seeta that made it possible for Sadie to stay with the plotline of wearing a second pair of ill-fitting snowpants. While Sadie pulled the too-large snowpants up to her armpits as a way to show Gale and me the pants were inappropriate, it was Seeta who pulled them down to fit at her waist. The pants were still too large, but at least they looked okay.

This was a poignant moment that told me how much Sadie cared about fitting into the story of school, a story that called for snowpants that fit. When she thought she did not fit in, as evidenced by the snowpants, both too large and too small, Sadie fell back into her relationship with Seeta. It was Seeta who, at both recess times and with both sets of snowpants, helped Sadie know what to do in this moment to fit in. It was in the lunch time moment that I wondered if Sadie experienced both me and her teacher as not knowing what it meant to go outside with snowpants that did not fit. Sadie experienced Seeta as knowing how to help negotiate a place in relation with classmates on the out-of-classroom place, the recess playground.

As I noticed the snowpants left behind in the cubby at the end of the day, I became aware again that Sadie had to negotiate conflicting stories of who she is and who she is becoming: one told by her mother of who Sadie was that Sadie needed to live out outside of school, one told by her teacher of who Sadie was that began to shape who Sadie was and was becoming both in and out of school, and one Sadie was trying to compose for herself. By leaving the second-hand snowpants at school and wearing her too-small ones home, I saw Sadie trying to live out the story her mother was telling of

her. By wearing the clothes that Gale had for her in school, I saw Sadie trying to live out the story Gale was telling of her. As these two stories bumped up, they created tension for Sadie, a tension that her friend Seeta helped her negotiate into a story she could live as she moved between conflicting plotlines of home and school. However, over time as the year progressed, I began to see Sadie move away from Seeta as one who knew.

I'm Not Listening

> Sadie was given a walking card[7] today. Gale told me that Sadie and Seeta were over 10 minutes late coming in from morning recess yesterday. When she tried to talk with the girls at lunch time about why this was not okay and how worried she had been Sadie put her coat over her head and would not listen to Gale. "I told her she had a choice to talk this over with me or we would have to go to the office to get a walking card," Gale said. "I wanted her to know that if she wasn't prepared to talk with me about the dangers behind this type of incident she would need to spend some recesses walking and talking with an adult supervisor about appropriate recess behaviour." Sadie ended up refusing to walk to the office so Gale ended up picking her up and carrying her. Half way there Sadie finally agreed to walk on her own. Gale was really troubled by all of this. (Field note, November 27, 2002)

I share this moment from my field notes as it speaks to the complexity of the story Sadie was living on the school landscape. Walking cards were a relatively new

[7] Walking cards were part of the school-wide discipline policy around playground behaviour. Walking cards were given when a certain number of behaviours were judged as outside the acceptable range. A walking card meant that you had to walk beside a teacher on playground supervision.

phenomenon at Ravine. They had emerged from a school committee that was trying to be responsive to unsafe playground behaviour. Instead of giving children time-outs or sending them to the office as had occurred in the past, school staff felt that an opportunity to walk and talk with playground supervisors would give children who had earlier demonstrated poor choices during recess a chance to reflect on their choices and alter their behaviour accordingly.

The use of walking cards fit with how the school staff was trying to encourage a sense of shared responsibility on the playground. However, Sadie's reaction to Gale suggested that Sadie did not buy into this story. By covering her ears and lying down on the ground Sadie was trying to exert her own control over her behaviour. Sadie's knowing was in direct conflict with Gale's knowing and when Sadie eventually gave up and began to walk to the office on her own she recognized her teacher as the authority on this matter. Gale was troubled by what had happened and questioned why Sadie reacted in the way she did. By talking to me about what had transpired with Sadie, Gale was trying to work through how she could have been more attentive to Sadie in this moment. This moment illustrates a meeting of lives, Sadie's and her teacher's, and how these lives are interwoven with the school story of recess behaviour and walking cards. Both Sadie's and Gale's reactions show how improvisation is always at play in the unfolding of a story of community.

A is for Angel

Later during free time Sadie and Seeta created an alphabet story on the small white board at the back of the room. "A is for angel," they wrote. Pretty soon the

> board was covered with alphabet letters and corresponding words. Under S they had put Sadie and Seeta and sisters. Neither one has a sister… The girls were disappointed when they weren't able to share with their classmates what they had drawn at the end of the day. Gale told them they hadn't been respectful to others during sharing and so they lost their chance to share themselves today. When Gale wasn't looking Sadie took her arm and rubbed it across the white board, smudging much of what had been on there. (Field note, December 18, 2002)

As I watched Sadie and Seeta giggle and cuddle close together as they wrote on the white board I recognized that all year long the two girls had experienced a relational story of community, a story that could allow them to see each other as sisters. I realized that the closest one girl could be to another would be as sisters, and Sadie and Seeta had brought this fantasy to life. Their laughter and close body proximity made visible the space they had made together, an island of community within the larger classroom community. Their desire to share what they had written with the larger class showed that they wanted to draw others into the story they were writing and living. When Sadie's and Seeta's continued giggling interrupted the sharing of others in the class Gale attended to the story of the larger community of the classroom. By telling Sadie and Seeta that they had been disrespectful she was signalling to them that they also needed to attend to who they were within this larger community. When Sadie rubbed her arm across the whiteboard she was responding to Gale's authority in the classroom with her own sense of authority over her work and relationship with Seeta.

An Identity Collage

> Gale and I had been talking for a few weeks about having the children create an identity collage. I was interested what pictures the children might choose to tell about themselves. How might they experience these collages as a "Me-in-Progress"?... Gale had created her own identity collage to share with the children as a way of getting them thinking about the activity… I wondered what sorts of stories they were beginning to tell themselves of their teacher based on her identity collage.
>
> The children were invited to select a piece of construction paper for their own collage. After asking my favourite colour, Sadie chose blue. Magazines were handed out and the children quickly became absorbed by the pictures. Several got lost in flipping through the pages and seemed to forget the task of selecting pictures for their collages. Although many of the children tried to find pictures that spoke about them, their interests, their families… others simply looked for pictures they liked. (Field note, January 9, 2003)

For Gale, and for me, the making of an identity collage was a way of exploring the story of community within the classroom. Gale's collage allowed her to bring experiences of who she was outside of the classroom and share that identity with her students. I wonder if the relational support Gale felt with me provided a space for her to bring herself to the collage making. When Gale talked of a picture she had included in her collage of a man fly fishing it allowed her to speak of moments she shared with her husband on the out-of-classroom place. The children picked up on this thread and talked about their own experiences fishing, looking for flies, or spending time outdoors with

their families. Gale had also included a picture of a kitchen and told the children how that was a room in her house that allowed her to connect with her family and friends. The kitchen was a space that allowed Gale to come together with others with whom she was in relation, to share stories of their lives. The experiences Gale lived in her kitchen were important in shaping how she storied herself as a caring, thoughtful person, and they influenced how she wanted to experience moments in other places, particularly the classroom place with her students. By sharing her identity collage with her students she was making herself vulnerable as she brought her whole self to the classroom experience. By inviting the children to create their own identity collage she was wondering how her students might bring their own out-of-school experiences to the story of community unfolding in the classroom. The collage was a way of creating a space for her students to speak of their own stories and to listen to the stories of others. It was a curriculum-making moment. However, it was a moment that led to tension as Sadie wove other elements into her identity collage, elements that illustrated she had her own understanding and experiences of community.

> Gale took me out into the hallway to show me the children's collages that she had put up. She had been working with the children individually to help them write paragraphs about their collages—which also allowed her to informally assess their writing. Gale particularly wanted to share Sadie's with me. Sadie had included a picture of a dog on her collage and had told Gale that she wanted to write that her dog's name was Marni. Gale knew that Sadie did not have a dog and was worried what others might say to Sadie if they read this in her paragraph. Gale ended up asking Sadie what her mom or brothers might think if they were to read that, "I

have a dog and her name is Marni." Instead Sadie ended up writing, "I like to pretend I have a dog named Marni." (Field note, January 20, 2003)

I was unsure how to respond to Gale when I first saw Sadie's collage. I understood that she was trying to protect Sadie from the teasing she thought might occur had the original sentence been included in her paragraph. Gale and I both knew that Sadie did not have a dog named Marni. She did not have a dog at all. Gale was again responding from an ethic of care as she tried to help Sadie separate fact from fiction.

This was not the first time that Sadie had fabricated a story. On the day after Christmas break when the children were sharing stories of their holidays, I had told how I had gone skiing with my family. Sadie offered that she too had gone skiing. When I spoke of having seen a particular movie with my son and daughter, Sadie said she had also gone to see the same movie and in fact had seen me in the theatre. When another child spoke of having been to Disneyland, Sadie said she had traveled there as well. Although Gale and I knew these stories to be untrue, I wonder if Sadie's fictionalization was a way for her to be in relationship with me and some of her classmates. She wanted to fit in by sharing similar stories with others. She seemed to be saying that these relationships were important to her. Her stories were a community making moment for her.

When Sadie included a picture of a dog in her identity collage and stated that the dog's name was Marni I wonder if she was trying to maintain this story of community with me. By being in my research and spending time with me in conversation, sometimes away from the larger classroom, Sadie and I had established a sense of community that was a part of, yet apart from, the larger classroom. Sadie's story of herself in the

classroom is understood around her story of relationship with me. By challenging Sadie's assertion that she had a dog named Marni, Gale was trying to scaffold Sadie's identity (Huber & Clandinin, 2004) as a community member in school and in her family. While Gale supported my relationship with Sadie, she did not encourage Sadie's fabrication around the picture of the dog in her identity collage. When Gale asked Sadie what her mother or brothers might think were they to see the original sentence, she was giving back Sadie's story to her in a way that positioned her in community with her family. Gale's interruption of Sadie's story turned it into a conflicting story, and Sadie, unable to live with the conflict, changed her story. In this moment Sadie had no one who would help her stay with the plotline created in her fiction.

Shovelling Snow

As the year progressed, my field notes show Sadie was shifting her attention away from Seeta and towards Sarah as a child who knew how to live in school.

> Sadie asked if I would come outside with her and Seeta. They planned to shovel snow off the front walks and wanted me to watch them. Overhearing the conversation, Sarah asked if she could join us as well. At recess time they led me to the front foyer where they picked up snow shovels and carried them outside. They were obviously familiar with this routine. "I like to help at school," Sadie told me. "I'm on student council and it's important that I help out the school too," shared Sarah. While Sadie and Sarah seemed to take their job of clearing the sidewalks quite seriously, Seeta tried to turn the activity into a game. When one of the girls would clear a path, Seeta would come from behind and cover it up again.

> Other times she would throw snow at Sadie or Sarah or hide behind a tree or bush and jump out as the girls passed by. Sadie and Sarah just shrugged their shoulders and kept right on working. (Field note, February 3, 2003)

> "I got a walking card yesterday because Seeta lied and said we were leaving the playground when we weren't," Sadie told me. "I wasn't really going to leave the school … I was just joking," she continued. As a result both girls had to eat their lunch in the office and walk with a supervisor during recess. Sadie was angry with Seeta and blamed her for what happened. (Field note, February 25, 2003)

Sadie's relationship with Seeta became complicated as Sadie came to know other ways of living in school. Sadie knew Seeta from time spent in daycare and time spent at school. But Sadie also came to know other competing plotlines in the story of school. As the year progressed, Sadie came to know Seeta as one who was often in trouble, but she also knew Seeta as her friend and someone who could be helpful in school. In the first field note moment (February 3, 2003) Sadie and Seeta volunteered to shovel the front walk of the school during recess time. They knew that this would be appreciated by teachers and visitors to the school. They were hopeful that the principal would notice what they had done. It was Sadie and Seeta who initiated this activity and invited Sarah to help.

Yet, in the second field note moment (February 25, 2003) Sadie shared her knowing of Seeta as a child who did not always fit with the story of a good student. Throughout the year, Seeta often got in trouble with Gale and with supervisors at lunch and recess. She didn't pay attention during teacher-directed lessons, she wandered around

the room at inappropriate times, she typically sat at the back when the class gathered together in the meeting area, and she had few friends, other than Sadie. This moment shows how Sadie began to move away from Seeta as one who knew.

Meeting Sadie's Mom

> Gale met me at the door of the classroom today. She told me how Sadie was in the office for an in-school suspension because of her lunch time misbehaviours with Seeta, and how her mother was being called to come and pick Sadie up. Colleen, one of the school secretaries, was worried after hearing Sadie cough non-stop when she was supposed to be doing her assigned work in the office. Thinking Sadie would be better cared for at home, Colleen called Sadie's mom at work and asked her to come and pick up her daughter. Sadie's mom wasn't very pleased with this interruption and Colleen said she had to talk her into coming to take Sadie home… Diane, Sadie's mom, stayed in the front hall while Sadie went to pick up her coat and backpack from the classroom. "Would you introduce me to your mom?" I asked her as I helped her gather her belongings. Sadie took my hand and led me back to her mother but seemed too shy to make the introductions. Sadie had never appeared shy to me before. Although I asked Diane if she wanted to sit with me on a nearby bench she chose to stand during our brief conversation… "Being a single mom is hard," Diane told me and was surprised to hear that I was also a single parent. We talked a bit about my research and how I valued the time I was spending with Sadie and her classmates. Although Diane recalled receiving and signing my consent letter she shared that Sadie did not talk

about me or any of her classmates, except for Seeta, at home. Diane also told me her worries about "losing a day's pay" if she doesn't return to work today. I heard how Sadie's older brothers were also home sick but were being cared for by a friend. When I asked if I might continue spending time in conversation with Sadie about her experiences in school Diane replied, "Okay. If you think it'll help you. Sadie probably likes it too." Sadie had remained silent throughout my conversation with her mother but at this point came to give her a hug. I was surprised when Diane also agreed to talk with me at a later date about her own experiences of Sadie's life at school. (Field note, March 6, 2003)

When Colleen, the school secretary, called Diane to pick up Sadie, Colleen was drawing attention to a school story of community. This was a story that spoke of parents picking up children who were sick, or better yet, keeping them home from school in the first place. Diane resisted this story at first by saying she needed to stay at work if she wanted to get paid. However, she eventually gave in and came to pick up her daughter but sent Sadie back to the classroom to gather her belongings while she waited outside the office, near the front doors of the school. This seemed to indicate that the office and the classroom were not places where Diane felt comfortable. She recognized that it was a space where her daughter lived when not at home or at daycare as she sent Sadie off on her own.

Diane was surprised when I returned with Sadie and tried to engage her in conversation. At first she was hesitant, preferring to stand resting against the front doors when I suggested we sit and visit. However, when I stated that I too was a single parent there was a connection made, based on a shared understanding of how difficult it could

be to raise children on your own. Sadie hung back as I spoke with her mother, only coming forward to offer a hug when she saw that her mother and I were friendly.

This was the only conversation I was able to have with Sadie's mother. I tried calling later that evening to inquire after Sadie's health, but was met with an answering machine message. I tried calling sporadically throughout the rest of the school year, always leaving my name and home phone number and inviting Sadie's mother to call. The call never came.

Learning to Draw Sunsets

> Sadie drew a picture of a sunset on the white board at the back of the room during free time this morning. "Sarah showed me how to draw sunsets," she said. She shared how she had seen a sunset last summer and was now drawing this picture for her classmates. "I'm good at sunsets," Sadie told them after the sharing… I noticed later that Sadie had been practicing drawing sunsets in her writer's notebook. (Field note, May 29, 2003)

By the end of the year my field notes show Sadie shifting her attention towards Sarah as one who knew how to live a life as student in school. Like Seeta, Sarah was in year two. She had straight brown hair often worn in different styles. She had nice clothes, did well in school, and was popular among her classmates. Sarah was the one who raised her hand whenever a question was asked in the meeting area. She was confident in her story to live by at school. She knew herself as a good student.

Sadie's story of who she was becoming at school was a complex one. It was not a smooth story. I wondered if Sadie's knowing of who or what to attend to kept shifting

back and forth. I wondered if Sadie was living in a kind of liminal space with a lack of clarity about where she belonged (Heilbrun, 1999). She continued to get in trouble throughout the year as she negotiated multiple ways of being in school. She was the student who shovelled the sidewalk with her friends. She was also the student who attempted to leave the school grounds at lunch time and suggested it was a joke when she was caught. And she was the student who copied how to draw sunsets from Sarah, a student who played a good part in the story of school. Perhaps as Sadie came to know herself as a student in the story of school, she began to lose confidence in Seeta as the one who knew. By sharing how she learned to draw a sunset from Sarah, I wondered if Sadie experienced Sarah as one who knew. By asking her teacher if she could share the sunset with the class I wondered if she was telling her teacher that she knew too.

I'll Miss You. Will You Miss Me?

> Sadie decided she wanted to write a goodbye letter today. She began to draw a Canada flag to go with her letter—but asked for my help drawing the maple leaf. "Can you copy a note for me?" she asked. I wrote:
>
> "Goodbye to everybody in the entire school.
>
> I'll miss you.
>
> You're the best kids ever.
>
> The teachers are, all over the world, you're the best.
>
> And you guys were working really hard.
>
> You guys are doing your best work
>
> And that's good.

I'll miss you. Will you miss me?

Love Sadie

Sadie imagined that Gale would call her up at the year-end assembly tomorrow and together they would read it to the entire school. "I'm going to ask if she can read it tomorrow, and um, we're going to go upstairs in the assembly and she's going to call me up and she's going to read it… It's about the whole school." When I asked Sadie about her new school she told me, "I've been in that new school… to pick up the people from there… some people from Meadowview go to my daycare…" Sadie told me that she hoped to still see Seeta at daycare. When I asked again about changing schools Sadie said, "My mom doesn't like this school… when people call and get sick they tell, they call their moms to come get them and that's not fair… my mom gets nervous then… I don't know why."

Sadie turned the conversation back to her new shoes and I realized this was her way of telling me she simply wanted to be together and visit rather than answer specific questions. (Field note, June 24, 2003)

Sadie first began talking about moving schools on a Monday in late March, a few weeks after the morning she had spent coughing in the office and her mother was called to take her home. Sadie's report card had also just been sent home the Friday before and I knew that her marks had not been strong. "Promise not to tell the office," she asked me as she continued to share, "My mom thinks the school is stupid and that the school doesn't know what to do" (Field note, March 24, 2003). I wonder if Sadie's mom experienced the report card much in the way that Sadie experienced receiving a walking card. In neither the story of the walking card nor the story of the report card was Sadie or her mother able

to enter into or shape the moments that were being experienced. Both stories seemed to put the school in a position of authority and Sadie in a position of being inadequate. However, Sadie's mother seemed to not accept the school's assessment of her daughter and chose to call the school "stupid." She decided that, unlike the school, she "[knew] what to do" and chose to pull her daughter from the school at year's end.

When Sadie asked me to help her write a note that she hoped might be shared with the entire school at a year-end assembly, she included a comment that indicated she recognized that teachers were "all over the world." I wondered if knowing that she would be attending a new school in the fall made Sadie attend to the fact that teachers were, indeed, not just at Ravine, but all over the world. The story of school is a pervasive story, and Sadie would soon be entering a new story in a new school with a new teacher. I wondered if Sadie was becoming attentive to how the story of school would continue to shape her story of community.

An Ending Place, For Now

Trying to write about Sadie's stories and my stories of Sadie I realize the complexity around her experiences of community in the classroom. Although I had several conversations with Sadie they were not framed around her experiences in the classroom. They were framed around the experiences we were sharing as we read books, talked about her family, shared moments of our weekends, or worked together on classroom activities, I often found myself stumbling in our conversations at first, searching for understanding, for meaning in her words, for the moments that would cause me to go "ah-ha!" My early field notes also captured how I was often in a hurry to

capture something important—something that would tell me about the experience of community in a classroom. Over time I learned to relax as I realized that only by attending to Sadie's life as it was unfolding could I begin to understand her experience of community as it too was unfolding within the classroom.

At the end of the year Sadie still managed to be the little girl wearing pink but without losing her space beside Seeta. She also managed to be the little girl who had a place alongside Sarah. At times she pushed against the story that seemed to be scripted in the classroom but I wondered if she was also grateful, in a way, for the assistance given to her in helping her understand how to belong. Although there was a part of me that was saddened by the loss of the little girl who burped, laughed, and ate her sandwich, I understood her desire to re-story herself in order to find a way into the community of the classroom, a way that would likely allow her greater success in her school and life experiences.

I can't help but wonder about the reasons Sadie was pulled, by her mother, from Ravine Elementary at the end of the school year. I wonder if this was due, in part, to the restorying of her little girl, a story that possibly did not resonate with the story the mother had been trying to write. Or was it because Sadie's mother was still angry at the school for storying her as an incompetent mother—a mother who sent unsatisfactory lunches, submitted cheques for school fees and clothing that bounced, got angry when she was pulled from work to pick up her sick daughter, and who did not attend parent-teacher interviews or other school celebrations? I wonder if Sadie's mother did not like the part that was being written for her in the story of community at the school. Maybe choosing to

remove her daughter from the school was her way of letting us know that the story of community at Ravine was not her story of community for her daughter.

Yet, Sadie did manage to find a way to embrace the story of community at Ravine. As I began to imagine ways of sharing Sadie's stories in year one, I realized all I had were her stories at school and her stories of school. I was not able to develop a relationship with her mother. All I have is the moments lived at school. As I watched Sadie those last few months of school I saw a young girl who shovelled walks for the school community, drew pictures of sunsets, and wore the clothes of students who had come before her. I saw a young girl who wanted to fit in, to belong. There were minor interruptions in this story that Sadie was trying to live out. She still sometimes rebelled against authority, she threatened to leave school grounds, and she would sometimes be inattentive or defiant in class. Sadie never lost touch with her friendship with Seeta, but her school experience was widened as she also began to develop a friendship with Sarah. As Sadie wrote a goodbye note to her friends at Ravine during the last week of school and prepared to attend a new school in the fall, I was left to wonder about the gaps between her story of who she was at school and who she was at home and how she made sense moving between these spaces. I was left with the image of the student sitting beside a friend on the first day of school trying to join in the singing of "If You're Happy and You Know It" along with the image of a pair of snowpants left behind in a classroom cubby.

Chapter 6

A Liminal Space with Aaron

There is a picture of an Indian in full headdress over the whiteboard at the front of the room. I know it is an Indian because it sits above the letter "Ii" in the alphabet chart. All of the time that Aaron was in the classroom he never made mention of that picture. I wonder if he noticed it, and if so, what sense he might have made of it.

"I used to keep a notebook too," Aaron told me after he had seen me carry one around the classroom for a few weeks (Field note, September 16, 2002). The following school day he brought in a small blue journal. "This was mine last year," he told me and showed me pages filled with scribble writing (Field note, September 17, 2002).

Aaron enjoyed the times his teacher invited the class to pull out their writer's notebooks. With shoulders bent and pencil grasped firmly in his hands he would attend to his work. Once, after bats were sighted on the school roof in the early fall, he came in from recess and immediately pulled out his notebook. "Wow, I really like your bat," I told him. Just before lunch, as I was preparing to leave, Aaron slipped a piece of paper into my hand. "This is for you," he quietly told me and then quickly returned to his desk. Walking down the hallway I opened the paper to discover the picture he had drawn. "To Mme," he had written along the top of the torn-out page (Field note, September 19, 2002).

In choosing Aaron as one of my research participants, I began to wonder how I might begin to travel towards his world and life experiences. How might his stories help me understand schools and classrooms as places of community? What might I learn from walking alongside him? How might my own stories and experiences of community be

challenged and shifted? Paley (1986) reminds me to be curious and not to seek answers in my relationship with Aaron. "As we seek to learn more about a child, we demonstrate the acts of observing, listening, questioning and wondering" (p. 127).

My stories of Aaron begin when he was a year two student in Gale's class at Ravine Elementary School. Although the classroom population was ethnically diverse, Aaron was the only child who was visibly of Aboriginal descent. My early encounters with Aaron occurred in his classroom at Ravine Elementary and, at times, in the school yard during recess breaks. However, as my research unfolded, Aaron's attendance at the school was interrupted by several family moves. Our meeting places shifted as I followed him to these other places. Because I had framed my initial research puzzle as a narrative inquiry, I anticipated my research relationship with Aaron might extend beyond the classroom walls. I had not, however, anticipated that my research would also extend beyond the city limits as I followed Aaron and his family to new homes and towns.

There are many ways to tell a story. Some of Aaron's story is understood through the narrative free verse in chapter 4. This chapter continues to tell Aaron's stories and stories of Aaron and makes connections between the stories in order to help me begin to imagine new ones to live and tell (Connelly & Clandinin, 1994).

My field notes and journal entries helped me create the narrative verse. In returning to the pages and pages of writing in my research notebooks I see now how I revealed more than factual occurrences. The writings also included my inner thoughts, feelings, and tensions. They are concrete examples of my involvement in the community of Aaron's classroom and in his life with his family. The pages and memories link him to me and remind me that I am writing this book for more than just myself. My desire to be

part of his understanding of community was present in every moment captured in my field texts.

In a Dark, Dark Wood

In a dark, dark Aaron	In a dark, dark Seeta
There was a dark, dark Aaron	There was a dark, dark Seeta
And in that dark, dark Aaron	And in that dark, dark Seeta
There was a dark, dark Aaron	There was a dark, dark Seeta

(Field note, October 24, 2002)

Aaron and Seeta sat at the back of the room reciting their own version of a popular Halloween poem. While the rest of the class read the words from the pocket chart at the front of the room, Aaron and Seeta quietly leaned into each other and substituted the other's name. They covered their mouths when they would giggle, careful not to draw excess attention to themselves. I found it interesting that two brown-skinned children, one Aboriginal and one East Indian, would name themselves as "dark, dark." I wondered if this game they played with words was also a way of naming their identity in the classroom and becoming visible to the other.

Aaron watched me watching him play with his friend. Each time he would lean over he would look at me first as if to see if I was going to ask him to stop. Instead I winked, encouraging him to continue with his game of words.

What happened in that moment of winking? I wonder now if my winking was a way of deciding where to stand in the classroom. I was unused to being in a classroom where I was not a teacher, a student, a parent, or a teacher educator. I was playing at what

it might mean for me to be a researcher and, at the time, was feeling like I was living on the borderland of this new classroom place. I wonder, too, about two brown children naming themselves as dark and where they may have been positioning themselves in the classroom. Did they also see themselves as living on the border of the classroom community, and was this why my attention was drawn to their game? I had come to the classroom interested in questions around community, questions around how children might experience classrooms as places of community. I was only present in the classroom two or three times a week and rarely spent a full day. My field notes show my delight in watching Aaron and Seeta play with words, and possibly their identity, and a "between" space being shaped, but my notes also highlight the tension I was experiencing as I realized I was encouraging what may have been perceived by their teacher as student misbehaviour. I worried how this might have positioned me in the teacher's eyes. I did not want to challenge her authority in the classroom. And so this moment illustrates a tension of straddling multiple worlds (Lugones, 1987) and the contradictions I experienced as I negotiated my place on the landscape.

When I first entered the classroom I did not have specific research participants in mind. I had imagined working with one child and his or her family but was open to other possibilities that might emerge as I began to develop relationships with the children in the classroom. I recall being asked in my candidacy exam how I would select my research participants. "I am hoping that they will choose me," I responded (Journal entry, October 19, 2002). In this moment of winking at Aaron I see how I was letting him know that I was aware of what he was doing and that I liked it. My wink opened up a border space for us to get to know one another. Anzaldúa (1987) speaks of the border as a space

"between two individuals [that] shrinks with intimacy" (preface). I was inviting Aaron in to this place of relationship, a meeting of *I and Thou* (Buber, 1958), shaped by attention to one another.

Jeanette's Story of Aaron

As had been true for Sadie, my field notes were filled with stories of Aaron. In mid-fall I sat down with Jeanette, the school principal, to ask her to share what she knew of Aaron's life.

> "I understand why you're drawn to Aaron," Jeanette told me when we sat down to talk. His aunt and uncle were also once students at Ravine, although like Aaron, their attendance was irregular. Aaron's mom, Karen, is 24 and no longer living with Aaron's father… Aaron first came to Ravine in Kindergarten but only attended, on average, one day a week. He went to different schools for Grade 1—she can't recall their names, or why the move from school to school—before coming back here…Aaron's grandmother, Paula, is very involved. Karen and Aaron live with her just a few blocks from the school. There are two younger children as well. Paula and Karen both wanted Aaron to come back to Ravine sometime during Grade 1. He had two separate start dates but never showed either time. On the third request Jeanette said no, he'd have to wait until fall. She worried about the teachers planning for something that didn't seem to materialize. Jeanette also told Aaron's mom that she would need to make an attempt to pay Aaron's school fees, to try to read to him at home on a regular basis and to participate in home-school conferences. I guess none of these conditions have

> been met. Jeanette is just grateful that Aaron has had fairly stable attendance so far this year, although she worries that he struggles so over his school work. She thought my involvement in his life might be a good thing—and that I should try to start building a connection with his grandmother… Jeanette is so attentive to the life stories of the kids in her school. (Field note, October 24, 2002)

From my conversation with Jeanette I realized that I was not the only one who was interested in understanding more of Aaron's story. As I listened to Jeanette I began to understand that she had a long history of relationship with Aaron's family. His aunt and his uncle, not much older than Aaron, had also been students at Ravine and they too had a history of interrupted attendance. This story was carried forward for Jeanette when Aaron first arrived at Ravine for Kindergarten and then returned for year two. Jeanette knew that Aaron was born when his mother was a teenager and that he was being raised by both his mother and his grandmother. She recognized the importance of extended family in his life. Jeanette had initiated many conversations with Aaron's grandmother and mother about how she might help school be a successful experience for Aaron. Jeanette had been worried when Aaron failed to show up for school after being registered on two separate occasions for year one. She worried that her story of school as an important part of a young person's life was not a story that was shared by Aaron's family. When Aaron's mother, Karen, inquired about Aaron returning for year two, Jeanette's conditions came from a place of elevating the importance of school in Aaron's story to live by. For Jeanette, the conditions also came from a place of care (Noddings, 1984; 1992). Jeanette's story of school involved good attendance and parental involvement. Understanding the family's financial situation, Jeanette did not say that Karen "had to"

pay the school fees, only that an effort should be made to pay them. She thought this would help Karen become more committed to the place of school in Aaron's life. As we talked that day in the office I realized that Jeanette's story of Aaron and his family was nested within her story of school. I also began to wonder how Aaron's story of school was nested within Jeanette's story of Aaron and his family. I saw myself walking into a midst of a "nested set of stories" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 63) and also began to wonder how I would begin to negotiate my place in all of these stories.

Another Set of Nested Stories

There was another set of nested stories that shaped my conversation with Jeanette. I had a story of Jeanette, based on past shared experiences. I had previously worked with student teachers in her school and I had also participated with Jeanette in other research and co-teaching experiences. From these other experiences of working alongside Jeanette at Ravine, I knew she had an ongoing commitment to reflection and inquiry and was interested in continuing to enhance the educative quality of experiences lived by children, staff, and families at the school.

Nested within my story of Jeanette was Jeanette's story of me. We recognized that we were both interested in seeing big (Greene, 1995), interested in how people lived their lives. Jeanette understood that there was an openness to my research wonder and she encouraged the improvisational nature of my work.

These nested stories also included Gale, Aaron's teacher. I also knew Gale from past experiences of working with student teachers in her classroom. We had shared conversations around the Centre table at the university about our interest in narrative

inquiry, children's lives, and classrooms as communities. I knew also that it was her relationship with Jeanette that pulled Gale back to Ravine after her study leave.

Having spent time in the school over the past several years in other capacities, I also recognized, from stories told by others about the school, that it was filled with children and families from diverse lives. These stories often centred around plotlines that talked of low socio-economic levels, multicultural families, and below-average student achievement scores. In all of these stories I saw possibility to let my research wonder play out.

Starting to Hear Aaron's Stories

"I like Halloween. It's spooky and you get candy if they say treat but if they say trick you have to do a trick," Aaron told me the day before Halloween (Field note, October 30, 2002). I knew by now that Aaron was living with his grandmother and aunt and uncle in a house near the school, while Aaron's mother lived with her new husband and two younger children in a small town an hour north of the city. Aaron was looking forward to a visit with his mother over the Halloween weekend. "My mom moved 500 miles away," Aaron continued. "My step-dad's coming home today. His name is Eric" (Field note, October 30, 2002).

Aaron spent much of the school year moving from house to house. When I first met Aaron he was living with his grandmother and her two youngest children in a rental property near Ravine School. The home was owned by the provincial Metis Housing Association, and Aaron's grandmother had lived there for over 20 years. The first home Aaron had known was the house near Ravine Elementary, where he lived with his mother

and her family when he was first born. Although Aaron experienced multiple moves in his young life, he had always, at some point, returned to the home near Ravine. While, at times, he had lived with his mother and grandmother under the same roof, other times he had lived with each one individually. But both women had always remained a constant in his life in some way. Most of my knowing of stories of Aaron's life came to me in the form of second-hand stories—stories I had been told by either Jeanette or Gale. The day before Halloween was the first time I was starting to hear stories of Aaron's life from Aaron.

Prior to Aaron talking to me about Halloween and about his step-father, we had been in the gym where Gale was leading the children in some creative movement activities. Aaron was more interested in the badminton nets that had been set up in the middle of the gymnasium floor. After being asked, along with another child, to take a time-out on one of the benches against the back wall, Aaron opted to wander into the hallway. The other child moved quickly to "tattle" on Aaron to the teacher. Aaron re-entered the gym just as Gale made her way to the door. "Can I help?" I intervened and was subsequently asked to take Aaron back to the classroom (Field note, October 30, 2002). Our conversation about his mother, step-father, and Halloween began the moment we entered the hallway. There was no mention of his misbehaviour in the gym. That was not important as I recognized I was finally listening to Aaron tell me his own stories and I began to see more deeply the complexity of his life.

Gale was not a stranger to Ravine. She had spent 12 years as a primary teacher at the school, having worked with five principals before Jeanette's arrival. One of the changes that Jeanette had initiated was the opportunity for children to spend a morning each June with the teacher they would have the following year. Although on leave, Gale returned to Ravine for this event. So when the children arrived in September Gale had met all but a few who were new to the school that fall.

Gale knew of my interest in thinking about community around stories of children's lives. Around the same time that Gale had visited the children the spring before she would welcome them in her classroom, she also welcomed me into her house to talk about my research puzzle and the possibility of her classroom as my research site.

> I just left Gale's house. My hands are shaking as I write these notes. She said yes! I had not realized I had been holding my breath. "I don't think I'm very articulate about my wonder yet," I told her, but she seemed to understand when I talked about my research puzzle as something evolving over time, in relationship with the kids in the classroom… We began our conversation at her kitchen table but soon ended up curled up on chairs in the living room, a glass of iced tea in our hands… Gale began to talk to me about her early teaching experiences and how her own wonders about teaching and learning led her back to graduate school… She is also interested in the complexity of children's and families' lives… and exploring questions around [her] teaching identity…Gale also wants to think more about notions of community and how to attend more to the experiences of the children. (Field note, June 12, 2002)

I walked away from that conversation in Gale's house feeling that we were standing on a shared ground of wondering what community might mean in a primary classroom. It was a ground we would return to often in our conversations.

Making people feel welcome was an important part of Gale's story of care and her story of classroom life. Gale spent a great deal of her summer preparing for the start of the new school year. There was a physical manifestation of how she wanted to live differently in the classroom by the lack of decoration that had typically been a signature in her teaching environment. Gale's primary teaching partners all commented on the relative barrenness of the classroom. "It won't last," laughed one of the teachers, as Gale finished preparing her room for the first day of school (Field note, August 29, 2002). Gale talked to me during those early days before the arrival of the children about her desire to have the children help shape the learning environment in the classroom and to involve them in the unfolding of the classroom story. She imagined beginning the year with an uncluttered classroom in order to leave space for the children to imprint stories of their own lives.

During the summer Gale sent personalized letters to each of her students saying how excited she was to be their teacher. She invited the children and their families to drop by the week before school started while she was finishing setting up the classroom. Only a few accepted this invitation and visited the classroom. On the first day of school Gale spent the morning with the children in activities designed to build a sense of classroom community. "That first hour… was really important… we were sort of getting to know each other, playing games and learning names… we were… coming together as a group" (Transcript of conversation, November 21, 2002).

Each of the children had his or her own desk identified with a laminated name tag Gale prepared over the summer. She was surprised when, an hour into the morning, Jeanette brought down a new student.

> Jeanette brought him down to the room and said, "This is Aaron and he's going to be in your classroom," and then she left him with me. He wasn't with an adult or anything, even at that point. He was just with Jeanette. And, um, he came in and he sat at his desk very quietly and he wasn't really ready to take part in what was happening… it almost set the pattern… and I remember trying to include him and trying to get him a desk and a name tag and his name on things and trying to do all that. Because I had met most of the other kids already and I had, and had given them all their stuff, but, um, even then you know, he didn't make any kind of eye contact or anything… he wouldn't let me get close to him even then. (Transcript of conversation, November 21, 2002)

Looking back, Gale recalled that Aaron had not been present when her children were first introduced as a new class together and she wondered if that contributed to him "remaining on the outside" (Transcript of conversation, November 21, 2002) of the classroom community. While Gale's interest in wondering about her classroom as a community space led her to consider how to have children feel a sense of belonging, I began to wonder if our questions around community were somewhat different. While I imagined remaining in a liminal space (Heilbrun, 1999), a space outside of the taken-for-granted story of teacher as leader, Gale was situated very strongly in the middle of that dominant story. For me the liminal space offered a sense of freedom, a release from the dominant story of teacher, and an opportunity to become myself. I soon realized,

however, that it was easier to stay in the space of liminality when you are a researcher; it is much more difficult to stay in that space when you are a teacher faced with students, parents, school and district policies, and a mandated curriculum every day. The story of teacher speaks to a need for some certainty around work. The story of researcher, of narrative inquiry, speaks to a space of wondering, openness, and remaining in "a state of necessary in-betweenness" (Heilbrun, 1999, p. 98).

Gale had a story of teacher based on 25 years of experience of what it meant to be in a classroom. My master's work (Pearce, 1995) highlights similar struggles I experienced as I moved between worlds, as a researcher alongside four young children in a school where I was also one of their teachers. It was my story of world travel (Lugones, 1987) outlined in this earlier research that helped me understand the complexity of Gale's positioning as a teacher in deeper ways. The growing awareness I experienced during my master's work, of the multiple shifts I experienced as I travelled within and between the worlds of teacher and researcher was important to my understanding of the experiences in Gale's classroom.

In those early days in Gale's classroom I began to wonder what story Aaron had as son, as brother, as grandson, as student, as a young Aboriginal boy that carried him through his days. Did he have an experience of straddling different worlds? What was his story of community? How would I tell his story in a "loving" way (Lugones, 1987)?

Attending Differently to Storied Lives

Snack time coincided with morning announcements, which were broadcast on an in-school television network. Many children often had nothing to eat during this time and

would approach Gale, complaining of being hungry. Early in the year she often had soda biscuits to share with these children, but as fall progressed Gale told me that she "wanted the children to be responsible for remembering their own snack." She didn't "want to see them go hungry" but "struggles over the right thing to do…" (Field note, October 17, 2002). Aaron was often one of these children who had nothing to eat for snack. I also struggled over "the right thing to do".

At the end of October I brought in a large box of crackers and a package of fruit leather. "I bought these for my children but they wouldn't eat them," I told Gale. "I wonder if you could make use of them at recess for children who are hungry" (Field note, October 28, 2002). In fact, I had bought the snacks solely for the purpose of bringing them to the classroom, but for some reason I was unable to admit this to Gale. Why?

> I'm only there twice a week. It's not my room... I worry I may have overstepped my bounds by bringing in snacks. Gale was so gracious and immediately thanked me for the food—but still I wondered if she was okay with this. (Field note, October 28, 2002)

Looking back, I see how I was trying to negotiate a relationship with Gale while at the same time trying to develop relationships with Aaron and his classmates. Gale graciously and willingly opened her door and her practice to me. Each day she welcomed me, notebook in hand, into the life of her classroom. I was mindful of how Gale, recently returned from a year's study leave, was trying to re-think her own teaching practice. I know that slowing down the daily requests for extra snacks from children who had not brought any was not a decision she had made lightly. Gale lived with these children on a daily basis in her classroom. I was present only two or three mornings a week. I did not

understand the holistic nature of her days, the long-term goals she had established and was working towards. In reflection I started to realize that we were attending to the story of snack in the classroom in very different ways. I was attending as a researcher trying to remain in a liminal space in the classroom—the one who was winking at Aaron and inviting him to join me on the adventure of my research. I was also attending from my place as a mother wanting to ensure that no one was left hungry. Gale was attending from her place of teacher, the one responsible for teaching the children about responsibility. At the moment of bringing extra snack into the classroom I wondered if this may have appeared as if I was challenging Gale's authority in the classroom. It is in reflection that I realize we were just attending to life in the classroom from different places. I was not thinking about the long-term goal of teaching the children responsibility when I brought in my snacks. I was merely responding simultaneously from my vantage point as a mother/teacher/researcher.

Unpacking this moment helped me explore the tensions inherent in doing research in another woman/mother's classroom. Although Gale and the children always made me feel very much at home in the classroom, I understood it was not my classroom and felt, at times, a need "to hold in check my natural responses to classroom situations in order to blend in with the culture of [Gale's] classroom" (Goldstein, 1997, p. 92).

The snacks were placed, unopened, on a shelf near Gale's desk in a small room adjacent to the classroom, a place that Gale shared as office space with another teacher. The following week, Aaron and Bradley both complained of being hungry as they were getting ready for recess, and I went to retrieve the box of crackers. It had remained on the shelf, unopened. Breaking the seal I handed some out to the boys and a small group of

children soon gathered around me. I tried to hide what I was doing from Gale. The children seemed to understand the need for secrecy and moved outside quickly.

As I try to stay with the tension in this moment I am reminded of how snack is part of the story of the primary classroom. I am reminded also of Sadie who needed to learn the story of eating lunch at school. Aaron did not eat lunch at school. Instead, he walked home each day to eat lunch with his grandmother. Sometimes he brought snack for morning recess, but most times he did not. He seemed to live outside the story of the classroom where snack was brought on a daily basis. By bringing in extra food and sneaking snack to Aaron and his friend, I realize I was also living outside the story of snack in the classroom. Doing this, though, I worried that I was acting against Gale's authority in the classroom. Again I felt somewhat of an outsider, part of but not a part of the classroom. In my research notebook I recorded the tension I was experiencing. "[Gale] has been so good to me. So welcoming and so generous. Yet, I still feel like a visitor to the classroom, somewhat of an outsider…" (Field note, November 7, 2002).

Creating Fictions of Aaron

Gale considered the development and nurturing of a caring community of learners to be at the centre of her life in the classroom. Gale was also trying to imagine a story of moral education being lived out on the classroom landscape.

> It's important to me that the kids, you know, that they're nice, that they all get along. I want them to feel connected… that we have a shared purpose… I feel like it's my role I guess to bring them together… and when they don't, when they're not responding in the way I hope they would, I feel inadequate… It's my main

> goal to bring them together, to be… a kind of caring community. And I work hard to create that space for them…There must be a basic ethic of care and mutual respect in the relationships in the classroom… (Transcript of conversation, October 3, 2002)

Gale felt a need to take an active role in the development of this caring classroom community. She was troubled when she sensed Aaron continued to remain on the margins. Operating from an ethic of care (Noddings, 1984) she shared her concerns about Aaron with Jeanette, the school principal, who encouraged Gale to call Aaron's grandmother.

> Gale wanted to talk to me at recess about a recent phone call she had with Paula [Aaron's grandmother]. She had talked earlier to Jeanette about her concerns—how Aaron seemed more of a visitor in the classroom, always appearing "on the verge of escape." She's concerned about his behaviour… She asked Paula to tell Aaron that Ravine was *his* school and this was *his* classroom for the whole year. She wanted Paula to help Aaron understand that "this is *his* classroom—he's not going anywhere… but I don't think Paula realized what I was trying to say." (Field note, November 7, 2002)

Later that same afternoon Gale found a note from Jeanette in her mailbox—"Gale, Come and talk to me ASAP—news about Aaron. Hugs, Jeanette" (Field note, November 7, 2002). When Gale and I joined Jeanette in her office, Jeanette began. "I give up!" She was expressing her frustration over a recent phone conversation with Paula, Aaron's grandmother. Paula had called the school to let them know that Aaron would be absent for a few weeks. Paula was taking him to Blue River, the Metis Settlement where she had

once lived, to visit her eldest daughter and she asked for extra homework ("lots of math") to be sent home with Aaron at the end of the day. "I told her how this in and out of school wasn't helping Aaron… [but] then she said they might move out there… How long can they keep doing this? He'll be an academic failure," Jeanette cried to us. Gale was troubled because Paula had not told her any of this in the conversation they shared the previous evening. Instead, "Paula said that Aaron has been crying himself to sleep… his [other grandparents] are splitting up and she thinks this is bothering him." Jeanette wondered if Aaron was feeling "out of place at home and at school… he doesn't know where he fits or where he belongs" (Transcript of conversation, November 7, 2002).

As I listened to Jeanette share her concerns with Gale, wonders arose in all of us about how to prevent Aaron from continuing to miss out on so much school and falling even further behind. Although Karen, Aaron's mom, suggested to Paula that Aaron could stay with her, this would still mean an extended absence from school. "Maybe Aaron could stay at home with [his aunt and uncle]?" Jeanette wondered. Gale then puzzled aloud the possibility of having Aaron stay with her. Picking up on this thread, I offered to help by keeping him on the weekends. At the time, we saw this as a caring response to Aaron, a way to maintain his connection to school. Jeanette was beginning to worry that she might have to involve the attendance board if old patterns resurfaced for Aaron.

I see now in this moment how Gale, Jeanette, and I were composing a fiction around Aaron's schooling. Aaron's life as a son and grandson was intertwined with his life as a student. A story of Aaron as student existed at Ravine, shaped by his interrupted attendance. However, this story was mainly told by the school staff and was a story I

accepted. Based on our story of school and our story of Aaron we thought we knew what was best for him.

This wasn't the first time I realized I had been composing a fiction around Aaron. Looking back I see there were many other times and places where I was creating fictionalized accounts of him. In our early fall conversation, Jeanette and I fictionalized stories around Aaron's sporadic attendance and his mother's apparent lack of care for his schooling. I also fictionalized him as feeling, like me, "as somewhat of an outsider" (Field note, November 7, 2002). I name these as fictions because I saw no empirical evidence to support these stories. These fictions were based on Gale's and my need to maintain narrative coherence (Carr, 1986) around our stories to live by.

A kind of arrogant perception.

As Gale, Jeanette, and I talked over plans about how to maintain consistency in Aaron's schooling, we did not seem to take into consideration what Aaron or his grandmother might want for Aaron. Once more we were adding to the fiction we had begun to create around Aaron's schooling and around his life. This time, though, our fictionalized story started to bump up against Aaron's story to live by.

After talking it over with her husband, Gale phoned Aaron's grandmother to ask if it was possible for Aaron to stay with her in order to remain in school while the rest of the family went to Blue River for a visit. Although Aaron's grandmother was cautiously open to this idea, she wanted Gale first to talk it over with Aaron.

> "He doesn't like to stay with strangers," she told [Gale on the phone]… "you need to talk to him about it." And [Gale] said, "Well I'm not really a stranger because

I've seen him every day for the past two months." (Transcript of conversation, November 7, 2002)

Gale and I met with Aaron in the nook behind the classroom. Aaron avoided eye contact with Gale as she invited him to stay with her while his grandmother went to Blue River. He glanced up at me once or twice as if to see where I stood on the matter. I remained surprisingly silent as I noticed Aaron's legs beating a steady rhythm beneath the table. "I'm not going with my grandma. I'm going to stay with my dad and my sister," he told us in a whisper, head bowed low (Field note, November 7, 2002). Gale and I glanced at each other. We didn't know there was another sister. What else didn't we know about Aaron?

Gale, Jeanette, and I saw Aaron's record of poor attendance as an interruption in a coherent story of school for him. Gale and I continued to sustain a fiction for Aaron when we discussed caring for Aaron during his grandmother's visit to Blue River. At the time we didn't think to wonder what Aaron might make of this offer. Neither did we understand that our offer perhaps privileged the story of school and interrupted the narrative coherence of Aaron's story to live by. Through his silence and body language, Aaron tried to tell us that he did not experience our invitation as caring.

On the phone, Aaron's grandmother referred to Gale as a stranger, a title to which she reacted, but one perhaps the grandmother was using to suggest how school might fit into Aaron's story to live by. I understand now how Aaron would have felt like a stranger in our homes. In our words and actions we separated ourselves from Aaron's and his grandmother's knowing of their worlds. What borders did we construct in our arrogance as we perceived Aaron as needing our story of care? I see now how we looked at Aaron

and his family with a kind of arrogant perception (Lugones, 1987). Failing to understand the importance of family in Aaron's story to live by kept me focused on me and my way of seeing the world. It moved me away from identifying with, loving, and understanding, in a particularly deep way, Aaron's world. This way of perceiving Aaron did not allow me to identify with him or witness who he was and was becoming in his world.

I shared some of my early field notes with my supervisor, Jean, and other members of my research community. At first I wrote myself out of the unpacking of the story, preferring to see it as an interaction involving only Aaron, his grandmother Paula, Gale, and Jeanette. I see this now as another form of arrogant perception. As I recollected Aaron's swinging legs as Gale spoke to him about staying behind while his grandmother went to the settlement, I wrote myself back into the story. I was the one who picked up on Gale's early wonder with Jeanette. I was the one who offered up my home on weekends. I was part of the fiction being created. I struggled over how to write up this moment. Writing was indeed a form of discovery—a way of researching into who I was and who I was becoming as a researcher in my study, of how the experience with Aaron and Gale was changing my life. Retelling the moment to my research colleagues caused a shift in my own identity. I began to awaken slowly to a shifted understanding of how fictionalizing comes out of a kind of arrogant perception and that only by attending from multiple ways and with loving playfulness (Lugones, 1987) to Aaron would I begin to understand his story of community and his story to live by. It was only by slowing down, stilling my voice, and attending at the periphery (Bateson, 1994) that enabled me to hear Aaron's story, his grandmother's story of him, and his mother's story of him.

Negotiating a Narratively Coherent Story to Live By

Regular attendance is one of the plotlines used to understand a successful story of school. Aaron's poor attendance was a place of tension for the school and for me. By attending to this place of tension where Aaron and his family's story to live by bumped up against the story of school, I began to see the tension in terms of what Connelly and Clandinin (1994) describe as competing and conflicting stories. When children live a plotline of poor attendance at school, teachers understand this story as conflicting with the dominant story of school, and so it was with Aaron. Aaron's record of poor attendance was in conflict with school expectations and policy. There was talk that if Aaron's attendance did not improve, the district truancy officer would need to be called. When Gale, Jeanette, and I suggested Aaron remain behind instead of travelling to the settlement with his grandmother, we moved into a conflicting story. The plotline of attendance became more important to us than the plotline of family, although we believed we were acting out of care for Aaron and his family. The conversation with Aaron's grandmother suggested that she had a different plotline for Aaron, a plotline that allowed Aaron to author his own story. Telling Gale "You need to talk to him about it" (Transcript of conversation, November 7, 2002) was the grandmother's way of letting us know her story of Aaron as capable of negotiating his own story in relation to the people around him, of being able to choose his own story to live by. The conversation with Aaron also showed us he told a different plotline for himself.

At the time, I thought Aaron was resisting the story Gale and I were writing for him; a story that scripted us as caring adults. I thought that staying behind with us in our homes in order to continue attending school, instead of going to the settlement to visit

family with his grandmother, was an important story for Aaron to live out. Lugones (1987) helps me see that I was again attending to Aaron from a place of arrogant perception. I realize now that Aaron was not acting from a place of resistance, but experienced a threat to his narrative coherence when we failed to attend to his story to live by, a story that saw him remaining with his family and forsaking school. Carr (1986) explains the narrative coherence of a life-story as a struggle with two aspects: "one to live out or up to a plan or narrative, large or small, particular or general; the other to construct or choose that narrative" (p. 96). The story Gale and I had written for Aaron did not make sense to him. What made sense to him was to stay with his grandmother or, at the very least, with his father and new baby sister. Family was what mattered; school did not.

I felt Aaron's absence during my next visit to the classroom, but at that time, I did not know if he had travelled with his grandmother, stayed in the city with his father, or gone to be with his mother. Not knowing where he was created an uncertainty for me. I wondered if he would be back and how to make sense of his absence in the larger story of school. Aaron had also become a character in my story of school and in my story of research, and I was struggling with all of these uncertainties.

While my research began as an inquiry into Aaron's story of community at school, this story was continually interwoven by his life outside of school. The story of Aaron's attendance is understood in reflection, by seeing his life, and not the fictions composed about and around him, as a student at Ravine and as a member of a loving family.

School fees and library books were often the subject of stories that the school office staff had of Aaron. Aaron's family had not paid their school fees at the beginning of the year and although Jeanette, the school principal, understood making payment may have been difficult for the family, the office staff was responsible for careful record keeping. When they received a call from Aaron's mother saying that Aaron would no longer be attending school at Ravine, they immediately prepared a bill for outstanding fees.

> An hour after Karen called, [the secretary] had printed off a list of outstanding fees that they expected the family to pay before releasing any of [Aaron's] materials. [Another secretary] told Gale not to let Aaron take anything as "he hasn't paid his bills so it all belongs to the school." He has three outstanding library books as well and they want those returned too. Recovering their losses seemed so important to them. (Field note, November 21, 2002)

The school staff was frustrated with what they perceived to be Aaron's on-again, off-again record with school attendance. By talking about outstanding fees they were trying to indicate to the family that school was important, a responsibility that needed to be taken seriously. Although the school was also used to Aaron's pattern of interrupted attendance this was the first time Aaron's grandmother would be leaving the nearby community. They were unsure if he would be returning to the school again and Gale spoke about some of the tension she was experiencing around this issue.

> And that mom, that grandma pleaded and begged Jeanette to take him back this year and stuff but like we're on such tight budget and stuff like Jeanette had

> talked about at the staff meeting. I mean there is just no extra money for anything. And they have to really go after the parents who aren't paying their fees and all of this stuff because we need that money and um, Jeanette's getting it from above, we have to make our budget balance. (Transcript of conversation, November 21, 2002)

Gale felt herself caught in the silences in the story. The story of school, dealing with its own budget constraints, called for library books returned on time, school fees paid in full, and a balanced budget. But Gale was also starting to wonder if school was maybe not an important thread in Aaron's story to live by. "I don't think school matters to him and his family like it does to many of my other kids.... I don't know what's right here..." (Transcript of conversation, November 21, 2002). Yet finding a place for Aaron, and maintaining a space for him, was an important part of Gale's story to live by as teacher. "I want him to feel like he can belong" (Transcript of conversation, November 21, 2002), she told me. Gale also spoke of how important our conversations were in helping her to be open to "uncertainty... and possibility" (Transcript of conversation, November 21, 2002) as she continued to think about who Aaron was and was becoming in her story of school. Gale had been a teacher for over 25 years, many of those at Ravine and all of them at the primary level. She was recognized as a strong, collaborative teacher, committed to her students and to their families. She worked hard at developing caring relationships. For her, Aaron was someone she struggled to understand. "It's hard to care for someone who doesn't seem to want to be cared for," she said (Transcript of conversation, November 21, 2002).

> And then I gave [Aaron's stepfather] the form that [the secretary] gave me and I said, "It's pretty expensive you know if we don't get [the library books] returned," and I stopped and said, "Somebody really has to come back for his report card anyway and stuff so why doesn't he just take his shoes now, because he's going to need his shoes and then when you come next week for his report card and bring his library books and stuff like that, then if I have anything else of his, we'll, we'll give it to you then…" And they turned to leave and I said to Aaron, I said, "Well, Aaron I'm going to miss you." And Aaron sort of shrugs and says, "Yeah." And walks out. And that was it. (Transcript of conversation, November 21, 2002)

Gale and I would often talk about what teaching as caring might look like. Gale spoke about care as a process. "Caring involves courage to go into the unknown by following the direction of the child" (Transcript of conversation, March 13, 2003), she told me. Gale was interested in Noddings' (2002) work on educating moral people and recognized the importance of establishing relationships with each of her students on an individual basis. She shared Noddings' (2002) belief that students need to learn both "how to care and be cared for" (p. 38). She perceived Aaron as not allowing himself to be cared for. Was this another fiction being created?

My daughter was sitting beside me as I tried to unpack this moment in my writing. At the time, Joanna was six years old and the evening before I had taught her how to knit. Her brother was away camping with his uncle in order to make space for my writing, but Joanna was home with me and wanted to be part of my work. Without talking, she moved the papers scattered around my feet and dragged in a small rocking

chair, perfect for her tiny frame. I saw her out of my peripheral vision picking up her needles and wool and beginning to knit. I continued typing but my mind was on my daughter. "Can you help me, Mom?" she asked after a while as she dropped a stitch. I was glad for the interruption. I was having trouble thinking through this notion of care and community in Gale's classroom. I finished the row my daughter had been working on and moved to start a new one. But my daughter asked for her knitting back and continued on silently with her work. I turned back to the computer, reminded by my daughter that I, too, had to slow down and stay with a task in order to pick up lost stitches and continue to unwind the threads.

Many of Gale's early school activities were designed to connect with the children and their families. She hosted a "Learning Conversation" evening in early September where she invited parents to come to the classroom one evening to tell her their hopes and dreams for their children. She wanted to learn what her students were like off the classroom and school landscapes. Gale was disappointed, however, when the evening often turned into mini parent-teacher conferences.

> I'm sure many of the parents didn't know what to expect… I wanted them to do the talking, not me… so they were almost more like parent-teacher conferences, like "how is he doing?" and "what does he need to work on?" and so we ended up getting more into that… but they still gave me a bit of information of the kinds of things they like to do at home and what they're like outside of school… when there was enough time I found the parents told me more about their lives. (Transcript of conversation, September 26, 2002)

Aaron's family was one of a handful who did not attend the learning conversation evening, nor did they attend the open house, so when they chose to pull Aaron from school a week prior to fall report cards and the regular "Celebration of Learning," Gale saw herself as failing to draw them into the community of the classroom. "We never connected… I never really got to know [Aaron] or his family… I didn't like [that]" (Transcript of conversation, March 13, 2003).

My daughter was just learning to knit that evening she sat beside me, so she had no sure story for what she was making. At times she spoke of a scarf, but at other times a blanket or a pillow. I began to wonder if Gale had a story for community in her classroom. Her story seemed to tell of open houses, celebrations of learning, and daily snack. Her story came from a place of care and it was a nice story of community. Jeanette, over her five years at the school, also worked hard to make Ravine a place of community, a place where everyone belonged. The school secretaries also had their own story of community. For them, part of being a responsible member of the community meant paying your fees and returning your library books on time.

There was a wonderful story of community going on at Ravine and for most children and families it was a story that resonated with their understanding of what it meant to belong and feel welcomed. By attending to Aaron's story, I began to understand that when he did not bring snack or failed to return library books, when his family paid for groceries instead of school fees, when they did not attend open houses or parent-teacher interviews, and particularly when Aaron stayed with his family instead of remaining at school, he and his family had their own story of community. Gale, Jeanette,

and even the school secretaries kept trying to care for Aaron and his family as if they shared the same story of community.

Travelling Off the Landscape

Aaron had been gone from Ravine for a month when I called his mother, Karen, who was living in a small town an hour north of the city. Jeanette and Gale both supported my desire to maintain a relationship with Aaron and to imagine continuing to have him in my research. Jeanette had located a number for Aaron's mother and Karen answered the phone when I called.

> When I began to tell her who I was, she told me that she already knew a little about me from Aaron and from her mother, Paula. What have they shared? I never asked…But I did feel more comfortable after she said this. Then she told me that her family was planning on moving back into the city [in a few weeks] – back into Paula's house near Ravine. Paula has decided to stay out at Blue River, which means her house is empty right now. "I'll just take over the rent," Karen said… She told me that she had been keeping up with Aaron's schoolwork at home and how she had considered registering him at a school [where she was currently living] but decided to wait and put him back at Ravine when they returned to the city… "The principal [of Ravine] made me feel bad about how I pulled Aaron from there," she told me after I shared that I was calling on my own behalf and not on behalf of the school. I tried to talk a bit about my research puzzle and how I believe that Aaron had much to teach me about school experiences. I think I tried to cram too much into the phone call. I wanted her to like me, I think, and

> say it was okay that I could continue to spend time with her son…I planned a visit out to [the town where they were living in two days] to meet with Karen and to reconnect with Aaron. When I asked her permission to tell the school that Aaron would be returning, Karen asked if I would also pick up some more homework for him and bring it out when I came. I also offered to pick up doughnuts. (Field note, December 8, 2002)

When Karen first told me on the phone that "she already knew a little about me from Aaron and from her mother" I did not realize that she was telling me I was part of a nested set of stories within her family. I did not even ask about the stories that had been shared. My field notes seem to suggest that I had assumed the stories shared had been positive. I wonder now if this was another form of arrogant perception (Lugones, 1987). In rereading this field note I am also struck by Karen's comment, "The principal made me feel bad about how I pulled Aaron from there" (Field note, December 8, 2002). She seemed to recognize that she was being storied as an irresponsible member of the Ravine community, but in my conversation with Karen I had also tried to distance myself somewhat from the school community. "I was calling… not on behalf of the school," (Field note, December 8, 2002) I told her. Like the early wink I had shared with Aaron, I was trying to invite Karen into a "between" space with me.

It was a 45-minute drive door to door from my home to Aaron's home in [the town where he was living]. The small apartment above and to the rear of an accounting office was easy to find because of Karen's clear directions. There was no address on the door but I recognized the creaky white staircase she had mentioned. The screen door, missing its latch, was swinging wide open. Only a gravel parking lot surrounded the

building. I remember searching, unsuccessfully, for a patch of grass where I thought Aaron might play with his siblings, but this was my story of play from my own childhood spent in small communities often bounded by ravines and green belts—a story that had me play hide and go seek, kick the can, and other childhood games for hours with my older siblings and neighbourhood friends. In my thoughts I was living out a parallel story, seeing Aaron in my terms and my plotlines. Again, I was seeing Aaron with a kind of arrogant perception. I did not know his story of play with his siblings.

Feeling dis-positioned.

I expected the inside of the home to look much like the outside, rundown and unkempt. I was continuing to build on to my fiction, from a continued view of arrogant perception, of Aaron as a child who, unable to pay school fees or locate lost library books, lived in disarray. My first glance of his inner home was overshadowed by Aaron's smiling face, and the sudden feel of his arms around my waist. Looking up, I was startled at the tidiness and brightness of the place. How often, I wondered, are people so quick to jump to conclusions when they first meet Aaron or his mother? Karen, newly pregnant, was curled up on a couch, pregnancy-related reading materials at her side. Eric, Aaron's step-father, was at her side, with baby Tristen in his arms. Two-year-old Kassidy rushed up to me, offering me a sip from her bottle filled with a blue-coloured liquid. Bending down to say hello I noticed a mouth full of decaying teeth and wondered about the secrets lying underneath Aaron's mouth full of silver caps. I felt myself falling into my fiction again—one that connected decaying teeth with the decaying front steps—and I wanted to stop my thoughts from folding back and forth on each other.

I had brought doughnuts and Eric offered me a cup of coffee. I heard how he had recently been laid off from his job as a pipe fitter and that he had picked up a few shifts at a local fast food restaurant. The money was not enough to support the family and he hoped to find new work in the city.

Visiting Aaron and his family in their home helped me attend to the other narrative threads in his story to live by. This was the first moment where I felt dis-positioned and started to attend to the fiction I was creating around Aaron. Over time I came to know Aaron as a narrative being who lived his life as a story. Moving between landscapes with him woke me up to seeing Aaron not only as a student at school but also as a son, stepson, grandson, and older brother. These multiple plotlines of identity within his family contributed to Aaron's narrative coherence as he composed his story to live by. As Karen and her husband spoke of moving back to the city for work purposes and having Aaron return to Ravine, I understood that school was a place Aaron went when it fit into the narrative coherence of his life. This way of storying school, as a place of coming and going, was their story of school. I first met Aaron when he lived with his grandmother in Edmonton before she eventually moved back to a Metis community to be near family. At the time of this writing, Aaron is living with his family in a small town near the settlement. These changes in living spaces are highlighted to illustrate how shifts in where Aaron lived corresponded to places where family members were living and to suggest that a significant part of his story to live by was shaped by a fluid sense of living on multiple landscapes. It is also significant to note that Aaron did not seem to experience significant interruptions in the coherence of his story to live by as a result of these moves. Moving with Aaron between the different places on the landscape allowed me to travel to

his world (Lugones, 1987). I understand now that living a story of student in school was just one thread in Aaron's story to live by and perhaps, for Aaron and his family, it was not a significant one. The other threads of son, stepson, grandson, brother, and Aboriginal child were perhaps the more significant ones. I was finally starting to re-story the careful fiction I had been creating.

A View From the Threshold

Jeanette was not surprised to hear that Aaron would be returning to Ravine. She was familiar with the story of how school fit into his life. Yet, this time, Jeanette struggled with the thought of Aaron's return.

> I was surprised when she told me she wasn't sure she wanted to let him back. I couldn't believe this was coming from Jeanette—Jeanette who was always so open, so caring, so understanding of the complex nature of children's lives. But then she began to talk about her worries for Gale and the rest of the class. She talked about how the class was beginning to settle, to find a rhythm. Of how Bradley's behaviour had substantially improved since Aaron's absence. Of how Aaron's pattern of attendance was disrupting for everyone… Eventually I mentioned how Gale had always maintained a place for Aaron in the classroom. His desk with his nametag was still there. I wonder if Gale always expected Aaron to come back too. Jeanette said she'd talk to Gale about this in the morning—and also that I was welcome to gather up some school work to take out to Aaron when I go to visit him. (Field note, December 8, 2004)

I wonder if Jeanette's struggle of welcoming back Aaron was, for her, a way of caring for Aaron, his teacher, and his classmates. Jeanette did not turn away from this new moment of tension. She worried about how Aaron's return might interrupt the story of the classroom that had been playing out in his absence. She explored possibilities about having Aaron return to a different classroom, a year three room where he would be with children closer to his own age. By talking about the tensions she was experiencing, Jeanette began to move into a liminal space, a space that allowed her to begin to imagine writing a new story of school that had a place for different stories of attendance and narrative coherence.

Aaron and his family only returned to the city for a short time at Christmas. His mother and stepfather separated shortly thereafter, and Aaron's mother took Aaron and his siblings to live with her mother on the Metis settlement. But Jeanette continued to "[hover] on the threshold" (Heilbrun, 1999, p. 90), and when Aaron returned to school on Valentine's Day she was the first one there with a welcoming hug.

A Kind of Loving Perception

Aaron found that when he eventually returned to Ravine and to Gale's classroom after a three-month absence, he was welcomed, cared for, and accepted.

> Aaron immediately headed for his classroom and found his desk. It still held his nametag. The rest of his classmates were outside for recess but Aaron began to put his new school supplies away. Then he folded his hands on top of his desk and waited for the bell, indicating lunch recess was over and the afternoon was about to begin. "Aaron's here!" The children shouted as they crowded around him and

began to rub his newly shaved head. Unselfconsciously, Aaron shared, "My mom shaved my hair 'cause I had lice." His classmates just smiled and chatted to him as they continued to rub his head. (Field note, February 14, 2003)

All year, Gale maintained a place for Aaron in the classroom through the continued presence of his nametag, first on his empty desk and later on the side of her filing cabinet. By keeping an empty desk and a nametag, she seemed to hold onto the fiction that Aaron remained a student in her classroom. Keeping Aaron's desk and nametag as well as leaving his name over his coat hook and in other places around the room helped keep Aaron alive in the memories of the children in the classroom. This also allowed Gale to continue her story to live by, that is, that she was a caring teacher open to the multiplicity of children's lives. This helped keep Ravine a welcoming place for Aaron as he continued throughout the year moving on and off the school landscape.

Aaron did not complete the year at Ravine Elementary. Six weeks after his last return his mother arranged another visit to her family on the Metis settlement. Aaron's story to live by was shaped by the life he lived in transition alongside his family. The landscape on which he lived with his family was continually shifting. Aaron helped me begin to imagine what might be otherwise if the school story of community was more fluid, embracing the complexity and multiplicity of a student's life. Opening up Aaron's story helped move Jeanette, Gale, and me into a liminal space. It was in this space of liminality where we were able to negotiate moment-to-moment and open up the possibility of different stories of attendance and community. When we began to share our concerns over Aaron's story of interrupted attendance we began to entangle the story of school and the story of community with the story of Aaron.

On two occasions I was able to visit with Aaron in his new home on the settlement. During the first visit, Aaron was standing on the side of the road where he had been waiting for the sight of my blue van. "My grandma said I was to watch for you" (Field note, April 10, 2003) Aaron told me as he hopped in my van and directed me to his auntie's house, where the entire family was waiting for me. The coffee was on and we sat for several hours as I heard stories about the renovations that Aaron's aunt and uncle had done in their home. I also heard Aaron's mother and grandmother talk about their dreams for a new home. Paula, Aaron's grandmother, shared some gossip about some of the neighbours and members of the Metis housing board. Before it was time for me to leave I was taken on a tour of the settlement and given a history of how the place came to be. "It's a part of me here… and I can come and go," Karen told me just as I was leaving (Field note, April 10, 2003). Maybe for Karen, the settlement, surrounded by her family and other relatives, was a home place (hooks, 1990), a place where it was okay to be uncertain, a place that gave her the strength to resist the fictions being created around her son. Maybe the purpose of her resistance was to be able to see her own and her son's stories to live by more clearly. Visiting this home place allowed me to hear this story.

My last visit to Aaron and his family occurred on what was the last day of school for Gale and the children at Ravine Elementary. I shared with Aaron a story that Gale had told me only a few days before.

> Gale told me that she had asked the children to clean out their desks yesterday, which also meant gathering up crayons, etc. When Shelby began to cry Gale went to see what was wrong. Shelby told her that Tony had taken a brown crayon from her which had been a gift from Aaron. "It's the only thing I have to remember

> him by," she said that Shelby had told her. Gale helped Shelby and Tony sort through all the crayons until they found the right one. When I asked Shelby today to tell me about the story of the brown crayon she said, "It was a present from Aaron. It's all I had to remember him by. It was brown like him and it was special. That's all I remember about him—that he gave me a brown crayon." (Field note, June 23, 2003)

On one of my early days at Ravine I witnessed a game between two dark-skinned children. They named themselves as dark as they made sense, in their own way, of a classroom poetry lesson. On one of my last days at the school I witnessed how one of these dark children, who lived a story of interrupted attendance, had also been an important part of the story of school for another young child. Both Seeta and Shelby had found it easy to make a space for Aaron and looked upon him with a playful and loving perception (Lugones, 1987). They make me wonder if they were always in that liminal space with Aaron. In struggling to understand community I realize I needed to understand it from the story Aaron was living.

An Ending Place, For Now

As I began to tell and retell stories of Aaron over time in his classroom at Ravine, in his home near the school, in his apartment in the small rural community, and in his home in the Metis community, I understood how these different locations shifted my understanding of his storied life. Aaron helped me awaken to the kinds of fictions teachers create around classrooms as places of community and children's places in that community.

The process of writing this chapter helped me learn things I did not know before I began the writing. Working with my supervisor, Jean, and her penchant for pencilling "say more" in the margins of my work, helped me get past the fear of needing to know what I wanted to say before I attempted any words on paper. Jean taught me to think of my writing as a method of discovery.

There were many hard parts about writing this chapter. How to write so my voice was heard, but not overpowering. How to write so other voices were heard and their lives honoured. How to select not only what to include but what to exclude. How to slow down and stay with the places of tension. How to pick up dropped threads.

For me, Aaron's story opens up a much more complex understanding of schools as places of community. Aaron taught me that community is a liminal space filled with relationships that shift and unfold over time and across place and that the only way we can understand community is to understand it from the child's perspective, the child's story within that liminal space. Until we know that, we know nothing.

I can still see Aaron sitting at his desk, hands folded, his classmates rubbing his freshly shaven head. I can also see him running around his grandmother's back yard in Blue River pointing out the location where he had found the home for a family of snakes. Aaron always had a curious and content look on his face. He was comfortable where he was—whether it be a classroom or an open space. He was always free with his story, telling me often, "Write it down, Marni. Do you want to write it down?" Yes Aaron, I want to keep learning from you and thinking about the multiple ways to write this story down.

Chapter 7

Returning to Ravine

It has been almost two years since I made my regular research visits to Ravine. I recall those many drives where, after I rounded the last big bend in the road, the school would suddenly appear on the landscape, a gentle woods running along the border of the playground. I can picture the play park, not quite so shiny and new, off to one side, separated from the school by two large parking lots. I remember how student patrollers used to help the younger children navigate to and from the play park safely. I can imagine myself passing through those front double doors of the school and seeing the familiar pit area, the colourful handprints and painted tiles on the walls, the books and teddy bears in every corner. Even now as I write about that imagined returning I am still there. I can feel my shoes clatter across the floor, experience the hugs from children, hear the warm greetings from Jeanette and Gale and others I came to know at the school.

My presence at Ravine was filled with experiences about who I imagined being and becoming in the larger context of teaching, learning, researching, and school landscapes. My intention to understand community from lived experiences was shaped within my understanding of stories to live by. Not only was I drawn into the lives of my participants, but I was drawn into the life of Gale's year one-two classroom and the life of Ravine Elementary School. I wondered about the ways our multiple lives and multiple landscapes were shaped in the moments of meeting.

In chapter 3 I shared my version of Buchholz (1999) book, *The Collector of Moments*. The book tells a story of a young boy who lives on a small island. An artist named Max comes to live with the boy and his family in a small room on the fourth floor

of their house. After befriending the boy, Max goes travelling and leaves the young boy with the key to his room and access to the paintings he has left behind. As the young boy examines each picture he notices something unusual taking place. "Happenings that confused me and mesmerized me and almost pulled me into the picture," he says.

I, too, collected moments during my time at Ravine Elementary, moments that confused me and mesmerized me and helped me think narratively about my research wonder. Crites (1971) helps me understand the importance of not merely collecting moments, but re-collecting them. Crites wrote, "all the sophisticated activities of consciousness literally re-collect the images lodged in memory into new configurations, reordering past experience" (p. 299). For him, "the most direct and obvious way of re-collecting is by telling a story" (p. 302). In chapter 3 I shared those images I collected, images that hinted at stories where something unusual was happening, something that confused me and mesmerized me, something that pulled me in and shaped my experiences and my understanding of community.

Re-collected Moments in the Midst

I want to return to some of those moments now and rethink them as I inquire more deeply into my experiences at Ravine and show something of the complexity of understanding community, but these moments I re-collect are still moments in the midst, moments connected through time and feelings, but also situated in place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

I return to these earlier moments and re-collect them in light of my relational responsibilities to my participants. Sadie and Aaron became the focus of my research

work. As they recognized me as someone interested in their experiences, their lives, it is with them in mind that I return to these earlier collected moments. As a narrative inquirer I want to think through what these moments might tell me about the experience of community in the context of students' lives. "To *attend*," Bateson (1994) writes, "means to be present, sometimes with companionship, sometimes with patience… The willingness to do what needs to be done is rooted to attention to what is… I believe that if we can learn a deeper noticing of the world around us, this will be the basis of effective concern" (p. 109). It is now with patience and with memories of companionship that I re-collect these moments, using Aaron's and Sadie's experiences as my lens to gain a deeper noticing of what it means to attend to community in a narrative, relational way. The moments initially captured in my research notebook were taken in with peripheral vision (Bateson, 1994), which made a space now for this re-collecting.

Re-collected moment: Awakening to a story of community.

Thinking about what it means to live relationally and narratively, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) wrote,

> We are, all of us, continually telling stories of our experience, whether or not we speak and write them… We learned that we, too, needed to tell our stories. Scribes we were not; story tellers and story livers we were. And in our story telling, the stories of our participants merged with our own to create new stories. (p. 12)

When I sat in that early year staff meeting and listened to Jeanette, the school principal, read the picture book *Hooray for Diffendoofer Day!* (Seuss et al., 1998), I

gained a small sense of Jeanette's personal practical knowledge (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) as it was lived out on the school landscape. I learned that it was important for Jeanette to find ways to attend to the intellectual, moral, and emotional dimensions of teachers' and other staff members' lives. I learned that Jeanette used books as a metaphor to help her staff uncover perceptions they had about teaching, learning, and schools, to uncover their own stories to live by. Something unusual took place as I sat and listened to Jeanette read the story of Diffendoofer School, happenings that confused me and mesmerized me. The story, told in verse, revolved around a school with teachers who wrote their own rules, taught an unusual curriculum, a place where students were engaged in thinking. Diffendoofer School looked like an amazing place to be.

During my time at Ravine I was drawn into the story of community that Jeanette was creating on the school landscape and Gale was creating on the classroom landscape. They, too, were amazing places to be. But during that early staff meeting, I wrote in my field note, "Only one voice wrote the story of Diffendoofer School. I wonder how the story might have looked if multiple voices were represented" (Field note, August 29, 2002). My field note captured a tension I was experiencing, a tension around voice and community, a tension I did not quite understand. What might we have learned about Diffendoofer School if there had been a conversation of voices in the book? Over the school year at Ravine Elementary, as I attended closely to Sadie's and Aaron's stories to live by, I thought about voices that are not heard at all, voices that are misunderstood, voices that are silenced. What happens to the stories to live by of these children? What would happen if there was a conversation of their voices?

A guiding principle of Ravine Elementary is evident in the words inscribed on the school's gym wall: "Ravine, A Place to Belong." I wonder about Sadie who shifted her story to find a way to fit in, to belong, to the school community. I wonder also about Aaron who lived a more solitary life at school, who was not very concerned with issues of belonging in school. His story of belonging is understood through his being a brother, son, grandson, and nephew, not student.

Greene (1995) writes of community as "always… in the making… energized and radiated by an awareness of future possibility" (p. 166), emphasizing there is always tension between what is and what could be. For Greene, this work evolves by arousing our imaginations. "Imagination is the one (cognitive capacity) that permits us to give credence to alternative realities. It allows us to break with the taken for granted, to set aside familiar distinctions and definitions" (Greene, 1995, p. 3). Imagination helps us maintain wakefulness as we continue to explore alternatives. If we want our schools and classrooms to be communities always in the making, we need to be sensitive to the multiple and diverse lives of people who inhabit the landscape. It is imagination, Greene (1995) tells us, that "enables us to cross the empty spaces between ourselves and those we teachers have called 'other' over the years" (p. 3).

In the early year staff meeting, Jeanette was opening up a space for dialogue, for telling and retelling stories of who we were and what we were about. I am left now with open questions, not about school as a place to belong, but as a possible place to become, a space that involves multiple conversations of multiple and diverse voices, a space that lies between people who are present to one another. I am pulled into these wonders.

As I turn now to moments re-collected from my time in Aaron's and Sadie's year one-two classroom, I see how it was attending to their lives in a relational way that allowed some of the secrets behind the moments to be revealed, opening up new spaces for possibility.

Re-collected moment: Chicken soup with rice.

"You always seem to be here on the first day of a new month," Gale said to me in the spring of my research year. "Maybe Maurice Sendak and Chicken Soup with Rice have something to teach me about community," I jokingly responded (Field note, May 5, 2003).

My early field notes show that I understood Gale was using the Chicken Soup with Rice activities as a way to build a relationship with her students based on shared experiences. The students looked forward to this monthly routine and it soon became part of the rhythm of their school year. "The students seem to look forward to the turn of the calendar—a new month, a new poem, a new bowl of soup," I wrote in my research notebook early in the school year. "Shane even asked Gale if she remembered to put the soup on this morning" (Field note, November 4, 2002). I recall many similar experiences from my own teaching days that revolved around sharing food as a way to come together and enjoy one another's company. I, too, saw this sharing as a way of making connections and building community.

It was not until January that my field notes began to capture some tensions I was beginning to experience around the Chicken Soup with Rice routine.

> It's Chicken Soup with Rice day again today. Gale asked if I would run to the nearest grocery store to pick up some soup as two of the year one-two teachers had forgotten to bring some in. I asked her if I should pick up a few extra cans as many kids often seemed to want more than what was typically offered. Gale said she already made more soup for her class than the other primary teachers did for theirs. When I was at the store I still considered buying extra because I knew Shane would be hungry and would try to ask for a second helping. But Aaron wasn't there so I thought I might be able to give a little extra to Shane... I wondered briefly about getting some type of soup without chicken. I know Sanju is not supposed to have meat but it seems that it is too hard for him to resist when he sees everyone else around him happily eating away… But I ended up getting exactly what Gale asked for. (Field note, January 6, 2003)

This field note shows the first time where my stories to live by as a researcher in Gale's classroom bumped up against the school story of Chicken Soup with Rice. From my time in the classroom I knew that Shane often came to school without having eaten breakfast. He never seemed to have enough to eat for lunch and almost all of my field notes around the Chicken Soup with Rice days contain references to Shane wanting more. In my own teaching practice, I too often used food as a way to create places of belonging based on a sharing of lived experiences. I'm sure there must have been times when there was not enough for extra helpings. Did I ever wonder if my students were coming to school hungry? I do not recall experiences where any of my students were unable to eat any of the food we prepared because of cultural or religious beliefs. But that does not

mean they did not exist. In my early teaching days, I likely did not take time to consider possibilities of diversity of beliefs.

The above field note shows how I was beginning to see the Chicken Soup with Rice activities from a new perspective. The activities, designed to be fun and to build community in the primary classrooms, caused Shane to push against the classroom story of one bowl for one child, and Sanju to push against his family's religious belief of eating no meat. My field note also shows that Aaron was not there on this particular day. In fact, Aaron's attendance records showed that he was absent for over half of the Chicken Soup for Rice days. I wonder, when he was present on those particular days, what sense Aaron might have made of the chicken soup with rice. Would he have experienced it as a story of belonging or simply a story of extra snack? For the children in the classroom, the Chicken Soup with Rice routine was part of the rhythm of their school year, a way of experiencing the passing of time in the classroom. It was something that was intended to connect them to each other and to other students in the primary program at the school. Aaron did not experience the Chicken Soup with Rice routine in that way. Perhaps, because he participated in so few of these days, there was no connection to the rhythm, the sense of shared community being created. What might Aaron have understood of Shane's story of asking for more, or of Sanju's sharing in the snack? Perhaps Aaron's lack of understanding of the larger story behind chicken soup with rice would have created a story of him not belonging.

As I attended to the narrative thread of the intention of building community in the classroom that was woven throughout the story of chicken soup with rice, I began to see how this story possibly unintentionally excluded several members of the classroom. I

wondered about other possibilities for stories of community, stories that might involve a relational way of knowing students' multiple stories to live by.

In early May, Gale's class was preparing to attend a primary assembly in the music room when Gale asked if I would stay behind and make the chicken soup. I asked if Sadie could stay behind to help me, giving us a space for conversation.

> Sadie was enjoying spending this time together and even volunteered to wipe down all of the desks in the classroom… "I wish there was enough for seconds," Sadie told me as she helped me stir the soup. When I asked her if she was hungry she told me that that it was Shane who would probably want seconds, "but there's never enough"... Before I could ask her any more the rest of the class returned from the assembly and Sadie helped me hand out the soup before we stopped for lunch. We made sure that Shane's bowl had a little extra. (Field note, May 5, 2003)

Sadie's comments to me as we were preparing the soup showed that she felt conflicted. She knew that one of her classmates would likely ask for second helpings. She also knew that her teacher prepared just enough for everyone to have a small bowl. Courage to make these two stories known came from the relationships Sadie had with her classmate and her teacher and through understanding both of their stories to live by. My field notes show Sadie and I moving out of a conflicting story into a competing story, at least in this one moment, as we prepared a special bowl for Shane with "a little extra" (Field note, May 5, 2003).

Something unusual happened for me around the Chicken Soup with Rice activities, something that confused me and mesmerized me. I did not question the

classroom story of chicken soup with rice with Gale, other than the one time of asking if I should purchase extra cans, but my ongoing tensions were recorded in my research notebooks. It is in these moments of tension that perhaps, like Sadie, I can become more attentive to relational and multiple ways of understanding stories of experience in the classroom. Perhaps I can begin to understand community in the diverse and complex landscape of classrooms and schools as a story of relationship. Perhaps stories can become the *meeting place* (Buber, 1965) for this new understanding. I am pulled into these wonders.

Re-collected moment: Learning conversations.

Gale was excited when she told me her idea of having learning conversations with the parents of the children in her classroom.

> Gale talked of wanting to have "learning conversations" with parents about the children in her classroom. Having been away on sabbatical for a year she didn't have a sense of the lives of her new year one-two children. She talked about wanting to find a way to understand who they were "outside of school hours" and of finding ways to invite parents into the classroom and into conversation. (Field note, August 29, 2002)

Learning conversations were new to Gale and to Ravine School. The idea stemmed from Gale's sense of returning to a classroom where she had little or no connections with the children and families who would be entering her room on the first day of school. She felt these casual conversations, around tea and cookies, would create a relaxed atmosphere for the sharing of stories. She was not prepared when many families

tried to shift the new story of the learning conversations into the better-known school story of parent-teacher interviews.

> Neil's dad came with him.... His was more almost like a parent-teacher interview. Well "how is he doing" and "what does he need to work on" and so we ended up getting more into Neil being very, very good at reading and spelling and, that, but that his coordination then is difficult. So he ended up taking home a little printing sheet... and that's not really what I wanted this to be but it's kind of where it went... But at the end, at least, he did give me a bit of information of the kinds of things they like to do at home and the games they play together and it gave me a bit of a better sense of Neil. (Transcript of conversation, September 26, 2002)

I wrote Gale a note shortly after we spoke of her experiences during these learning conversations.

> I loved your idea of having "learning conversations" with the families of your students. I sense how uncomfortable it was for you when Neil's dad kept turning it into a parent-teacher interview. For many parents I suspect that is the only story they have of conversations with their child's teacher... I know what you've shared with me about these conversations has helped me understand a little bit more about the lives of some of the students... It's interesting how the ones you only had 15 minutes for turned more into an interview and the ones that allowed for more time ended up opening that space to allow you a glimpse into the lives at home and outside of school. (Note to teacher, September 27, 2002)

Gale's idea of inviting parents to participate in learning conversations with her reveals a new beginning for a relational context for her work as a teacher of young

children. Gale talked of learning about her students through listening to the stories their parents might share of them. Gale intended to use the learning conversations as a way to learn about a child from a parent's knowing.

Gale had returned to Ravine fresh from being part of the table conversations at the Centre at the University of Alberta, conversations that often spoke of relational knowing and of a narrative understanding of lives in school. Gale also returned to Ravine fresh from reading stories of educators such as Vivian Paley whose writing resonated with Gale's desire to learn more about the lives of the children in her classroom through the "acts of observing, listening, questioning, and wondering" (Paley, 1986, p. 127). In her final capping exercise for her master's project Gale wrote, "As educators it is important that we change the landscape of our classrooms so that schools can be a place for shared lives and relationships." Like Paley (1986; 2004; 1981; 1990; 1992; 1997; 2000), Gale was curious about the lives of her children, inside and outside of school. She imagined the conversations as an educative experience (Dewey, 1938). However, as some of the learning conversations unfolded, she saw that many parents brought their own narrative histories around school and parent-teacher interviews to the table. There was an established tradition for these families around what was to occur when they sat down to talk with their child's teacher on the school landscape. These stories bumped up against the new relational stories Gale was hoping to live out, and she felt herself being pulled back into these old stories. Although on sabbatical for the past year, Gale had been part of the stories that had long existed at Ravine. She returned again in the midst of these ongoing stories, in the midst of the traditions of the school, yet her interest around learning conversations showed how she was trying to live out a counterstory (Lindemann

Nelson, 1995), a place of resisting the dominant story around teachers and parents talking to each other at school. Clearly Gale's story to live by was rubbing up against existing school stories around parent-teacher interviews.

At the core of the learning conversations concept was the assumption that shared dialogue would come easily to the parents, that parents would be comfortable sharing their own stories to live by, that parents would arrive in the classroom with a trusting relationship with their child's teacher already in place. By having tea, juice, and cookies available Gale was trying to make the meetings "feel like an extension of sitting around a family kitchen table" (Transcript of conversation, September 26, 2002), of sharing stories that come out of daily experiences, daily lives. However, the meetings were requested and set up by Gale and occurred in her year one-two classroom. It was positioned as their children's teacher that Gale invited the parents into conversation.

There was a schedule to the meetings, and a specific amount of time was allotted for each family. My note to Gale, following the learning conversations, shows my support of the activity and makes mention of the importance of time in establishing relationships. Belenky, Bond, and Weinstock (1997) write of the challenges they experienced when trying to create a safe space that would encourage relationships and dialogue in a project that involved bringing together poor, rural mothers of preschool-aged children:

> We were constantly striving to understand where each woman was coming from and where she was trying to go. To enter another's frame takes a great leap of imagination… Working hard to draw each other out and to listen to and speak our own stories often reminded us of the way friends gather around the kitchen table:

> talking, sharing stories, laughing, and sometimes sitting lost in thought, pondering meanings and alternatives. (p. 83)

Belenky, Bond, and Weinstock's (1997) words call me to understand that learning about ourselves and others happens as we listen and talk with care over sustained periods of time. This way of being in relation unfolds slowly and often in multiple ways, depending on the uniqueness of each individual. Dialogue and relationship may mean different things to different people, but both are connected to trust (Belenky et al., 1997).

In her work on parents' positioning on school landscapes, Pushor (2001) also helps draw my attention to the importance of "time and contact" in developing trusting relationships:

> Time and contact for teachers to become confident about their own knowledge and the knowledge of parents. Time and contact for parents to become confident about their own knowledge and the knowledge of teachers. Time and contact to develop an appreciation for how that knowledge can inform and enrich one another. (p. 234)

One way of understanding the experience of the learning conversations in Gale's year one-two room is from an insider-outsider understanding of community. Gale came to the table as an "insider with a rightful place… a respected place" (Pushor, 2001, p. 220) in the school. Parents came as outsiders, bringing their knowing as parents that occurred off the school landscape. The learning conversations were the first time that many of the parents first came to know Gale as their child's teacher. For many, it was their first point of face-to-face contact. Although Gale tried to position the parents as teachers who had something to tell her about their children, many of the parents resisted

this positioning and instead moved Gale back into the more well-known school story of teacher as the one who knows. Perhaps this story of parent and teacher is so ingrained in the story of school that it is hard to break open.

Another way to read the moment of the learning conversations is with a relational understanding of community. Pushor (2001) helps me see the "possibility in the messiness of parents and educators connecting their knowing and constructing shared leadership and authority in the schooling of children" (p. 287). It was with a feeling of possibility that Gale initiated the learning conversations. It was with a sense of uncertainty that she invited parents to the table. However, she had long lived a story of insider on the school landscape. Sitting at the table in her classroom, positioned as a teacher, was a safe place for her. While inviting parents to that table shifted her position into a more vulnerable space, opening her up to parent stories of experience, it was a space that was difficult for her to maintain. Perhaps it is remaining in a vulnerable (Behar, 1996) space that helps open a way "to enter into the world around you" (p. 3). Perhaps by making her discomfort and uncertainty known to me, Gale may be able to continue thinking about learning conversations as a between space, an unfolding, fluid, and messy way of being in relationship with the families of the children in her classroom. Perhaps it may have helped for Gale to see learning conversations as a beginning, as a first chapter in negotiating a new story of parent-teacher relationships.

Neither Aaron's nor Sadie's families attended the learning conversation evenings. In fact, my research notebook shows that Sadie's mother entered the school only once, when she was called to take her sick daughter home. During my year at the school, Karen, Aaron's mother, also came only once, to renegotiate her son's entry into the

school. This was a meeting I had helped arrange for Karen and in which I also participated. It was also a meeting that came to pass only after I had spent several months in conversation with Karen off the school landscape, a relationship where I was not positioned as her son's teacher. My relationship with Karen unfolded after I first came to know her son, Aaron, as a researcher in his classroom. It was over time that they both came to know my story as researcher, as someone interested in their experiences, their lives. It was over time that I came to hear Karen's own life stories that spoke of school as a place where she felt powerless, alone, afraid, and isolated.

Perhaps the learning conversations initiated by Gale were seen more as a burden or threat to Karen's busy, complex life than as an opportunity to begin to develop a caring relationship with her son's teacher and to become a participant in the classroom community. Perhaps this was also true for Sadie's mom. Coles (1997) reminds me of our obligations to "think carefully about how we approach . . . people and how we *are* with them, not to mention how we take leave of them" (p. 79). Coles makes me wonder how Diane, Sadie's mom, and Karen, Aaron's mom, experienced themselves as parents in the intersections of their lives with Gale, teacher of their children. Diane was a single parent whose cheques for school fees often bounced, who was upset when her child came home in second-hand clothes, and who found it difficult to take time away from work to care for a sick child. Karen was a young Metis woman who had not completed formal schooling, struggled financially to care for her young children, and experienced multiple moves to find ways to remain close to her larger family. Gale was a well-educated, successful white teacher, happily married, and mother to two grown university-educated young men. Diane, Karen, and Gale all have narrative histories they carry forward onto

school landscapes, narrative histories that shape present experiences, narrative histories that continue to unfold into new lived stories.

Exploring who we are in relation helps us attend to the diverse ways we may understand similar experiences. The learning conversations, or the invitation to a learning conversation, may have meant something quite different for Diane, Karen, and Gale.

The re-collected moment of the learning conversations reminds me that providing a place for parents' stories to be heard and inviting them to the table is not enough. Gale, Sadie, Aaron, Diane, and Karen raise questions for me about what it means to imagine a story of community in our schools and classrooms as a space where diverse teachers, students, and parents all participate in writing their diverse lives. "Teachers cannot hope to begin to understand who sits before them unless they can connect with the families and communities from which… students come" (Delpit, 1995, p. 179). In Gale's story of initiating learning conversations we hear a teacher who wants to develop deeper relationships, wants to connect with students and their families. We see Gale reaching out to begin to explore new stories she is trying to live out around relational knowing. In Gale's accounting of her experience with Neil's father, we see a parent who did not, at least in that moment, understand what Gale was trying to do in this moment of the learning conversation. Perhaps, as I commended Gale on the initiative of the learning conversations, neither one of us understood the complexity of shifting the story of parents and teachers being in conversation around children's schooling. Staying with this new storyline of learning conversations as relational knowing is not easy. It requires staying in a vulnerable, uncertain, and messy place. It requires attending to the narrative histories people bring with them into conversation. It requires "time and contact."

Although the concept of learning conversations moves us closer to a story of community as relationship, it is a story that needs to be opened up and inquired into. It was a good activity with good intention, but it was a story of community as insider-outsider that was truly being privileged.

At first, recognizing that Aaron's and Sadie's families did not participate in the learning conversations and, in fact, never entered the classroom during the year and only once entered the school landscape, seems to indicate that they did not wish to be part of this conversation around relational knowing or community. However, their stories shift my attention to ways in which I might re-imagine learning conversations as a bridging (Anzaldúa, 2002) activity. Anzaldúa writes, "Bridges are thresholds to other realities…They are passageways, conduits, and connectors that connote transitioning, crossing borders, and changing perspectives… Transformations occur in this in-between space, an unstable, unpredictable, precarious, always-in-transition space lacking clear boundaries" (p. 1). What Anzaldúa draws my attention to is the liminality and the transformative possibility offered by imagining learning conversations as ongoing, relational, and fluid activities, responsive to the uniqueness of the people gathered at the table. Anzaldúa goes on to say, "Bridging is the work of opening the gate to the stranger, within and without… To bridge is to attempt community" (p. 3). As a bridging activity, learning conversations are not just about inviting parents to the table for conversation around classroom and school experiences, but about listening to and honouring one another's life stories, inside and outside of school, and re-imagining, together, ways of staying in the in-between space of relationship. Maybe by staying with the tensions experienced by holding open such a space, we can move beyond thinking of bridging as a

passageway from home to school but as a border space that allows us to attend more fully to the lives of people who come together. Maybe then it will be a space that more people are willing to move towards. It is these puzzles around learning conversations and changing perspectives when parents and teachers come together that confused me and mesmerized me and pulled me further into wonders around community.

Re-collected moment: Exploration time.

Just as for the children in Gale's classroom, exploration time was my favourite time of the day. Beginning the school day with exploration time shaped a storyline in the classroom, a story that suggested that play was important work in the classroom and that students needed a space to negotiate a transition between themselves and school. While the activity may have been initially designed to allow children a way to reconnect with one another and with their lives at school, perhaps for the children it was a bridging activity, an opportunity not merely to cross over from home to school, but to remain on the threshold. My field notes show that the children would have preferred exploration time to go on for much longer. Something unusual happened around exploration time; happenings that confused me and mesmerized me.

The children would already be well caught up in their play by the time I entered the room during my regular visits. Entering during exploration time allowed me to glimpse a piece of Gale's personal practical knowledge at work in her classroom practice. Clandinin and Connelly (1995) identify personal practical knowledge as the tacit knowledge held by teachers that influences their day-to-day practice of teaching. It is the classroom they write that "is a safe place, generally free from scrutiny, where teachers are

free to live stories of practice" (p. 13). Attending to exploration time helped me understand how Gale expressed her teacher knowledge. Beginning the day in this open, free, and unstructured way suggested that Gale believed strongly in creating a space for her students to make a transition from their lives outside of school to their lives inside of school. Gale was the only primary teacher who started her day in this way. Attending to the children's stories of wanting to stretch exploration time, or of disappointment if the day occasionally did not start in this way, suggested that the children experienced exploration time as much more than a transition activity.

Exploration time, regardless of the time of year, would often find Sadie and Seeta playing together. When I entered the classroom, I would usually find the two girls acting out a play at the puppet centre, writing on the board, playing a game, or just visiting in the meeting area. Near the beginning of the year the two girls would often be playing away from the other children, but their circle widened as the year progressed. If I arrived with a few moments left in exploration time, Sadie would greet me at the door, take me by the hand, and lead me to where she was playing. "Come see what we are doing," she would often say (Field note, October 28, 2002), gently navigating me through the bodies of children scattered throughout the floor and tables in the classroom. By taking me in hand, Sadie was showing me the classroom as a place of her story and inviting me into dialogue with her. What I attended to in these moments of walking alongside Sadie was how important exploration time was to her stories to live by. This time with her friends, in the classroom, was not about answering questions, remaining seated at her desk, struggling to complete her work, or wanting to be "just like teacher" (Field note, October 28, 2002). Instead, it was about negotiating relationships with her classmates, sharing

stories of her life, engaging in imaginative play, and discovering who she was and was becoming on the classroom landscape.

When Aaron was present he would typically be surrounded by Bradley and a few other boys, busily making cars or other vehicles in the Lego centre.

> Aaron and Bradley are at the Lego centre again. It was interesting watching their play. Troy sat at the edge of their play for a while, almost as if he was trying to get a sense of the play. Aaron and Bradley didn't really ignore him but they also didn't actively encourage him to play either… Eventually Aaron drove a car up to Troy's knee, parked it, and moved to get another one. Troy then picked up where Aaron had stopped and moved his car into the field of play. (Field note, February 18, 2003)

This form of play seemed to allow a space for everyone to participate. Aaron's invitation to Troy of "come and join the play" was not expressed in words, but revealed through his actions of moving the car within Troy's easy reach. Aaron gave Troy an entry point into the play. By including Troy in this way, Aaron showed Troy how he accepted him as he was. Perhaps this action came out of Aaron's experience as an older brother. Perhaps this was his way of playing that he had learned in relation with his two younger siblings at home. While Troy may have struggled about how to negotiate entry into the play, Aaron seemed to have no such struggle. Perhaps Aaron empathized with Troy's story of being on the edge. Perhaps, like Reeny in *The Girl with the Brown Crayon* (Paley, 1997), Aaron understood the importance of finding "a common core of references without blurring our own special profiles" (p. viii). Seeing Aaron and Troy interact in this way helped me understand more about who they were and were becoming. Their beliefs,

their stories to live by, came out in their play. By providing an early morning space for this play-based exploration time, Gale was giving the children freedom to disclose their stories to one another. Exploration time allowed Troy and Aaron to interact socially and playfully and see one another in what Paley referred to as human terms. Although exploration time was not part of the mandated curriculum, it was part of the story of community being lived in the classroom.

Early in the school year, Gale had arranged a meeting time around the establishment of rules for exploration time. When I arrived in the classroom, as the students and Gale were well into the conversation, talk revolved around the number of children that could play in one area at any given time. While some children seemed to be arguing for a limited number, others were trying to leave it more open and unbounded. "How about we just say work with your friends and see what happens after a while?" Gale asked the children (Field note, September 11, 2002). Eventually the class agreed on four rules that were later posted on a chart in the room: Choose carefully; Quiet voices; Work with your friends; and, Put things back the way you found them.

> When I asked Gale later about these rules, she said that the only one that really mattered to her was "Put things back the way you found them." She shared how she didn't want to be the one to have to clean up after the children. "It's all about responsibility and care for the classroom," she said. She also spoke of not minding if children always returned to the same centre over time. "I have to remember that kids gravitate to what really interests them, and this time is more about reconnecting with their classmates." (Field note, September 11, 2002)

Tensions around exploration time first started to surface in the spring, shortly after a new student teacher in the classroom started to take more responsibility for planning lessons.

> It was the first school day of a new month and that meant Chicken Soup with Rice day… Gale asked me to help her wash the bowls and spoons in the staff room in preparation. I think she wanted to talk privately about [her student teacher's] decision to stop holding exploration time first thing in the morning. "My kids need this unstructured time to visit and get ready for their school work but [my student teacher] finds it stressful… I'm trying to let her discover what works for her but I don't think this is working for the kids," Gale said. Gale seems to miss this time of allowing the children to share pieces of their home lives at school… We talked about why [the student teacher] seems to not find time to have Exploration—they had talked about it today and it was written on the lesson plans on paper, but when it came time to putting the agenda on the white board, [the student teacher] omitted Exploration… this seemed to trouble Gale a lot. (Field note, April 7, 2003)

Gale keenly felt the absence of exploration time in her classroom. Perhaps for her it was an integral part of the day, a time that allowed for "the intense preoccupation of a group of children… inventing new worlds as they learn to know each other's dreams" (Paley, 1997, p. 50). My field notes do not recall if Gale ever shared her passion around exploration time with her student teacher or let her know the reasoning behind her desire to begin the classroom day in this way, yet, from my conversation with Gale as we were washing the dishes in preparation for sharing chicken soup with rice, I saw how much

this early morning time mattered to her. By pulling me into the staffroom to share her concerns, Gale showed how she was caught in a conflicting story around issues of care and relationship. She showed also how exploration time was a vulnerable space for her, a space that spoke of uncertainty around maintaining her story to live by in the classroom. By allowing the student teacher freedom to cancel exploration time, Gale showed how she was responsive to the need to allow her student teacher opportunity to negotiate her own story to live by within the classroom, but by sharing her concern with me, Gale also showed the tensions she was experiencing around this story of attending to relationship and transition time in the classroom. She showed how she tried to move through this tension in a relational way, by turning to me to share her story. Perhaps attending to exploration time as a bridging activity may have given Gale a way out of this conflicting story. Perhaps it may have provided a space to open up this wider dialogue with her student teacher.

By sharing this re-collected moment around exploration time, the student teacher's decision to cancel it, and Gale's tension around this decision, I do not mean to suggest a rightness or wrongness to the decision, but to look instead for insight into the moment. Bateson (1994) teaches me that insight "refers to that depth of understanding that comes by setting experiences, yours and mine, familiar and exotic, new and old, side by side, learning by letting them speak to one another" (p. 14). By attending to exploration time in these multiple ways I began to see how it might shape an understanding of community in the classroom. For Gale, exploration time was an opportunity to allow her students a relational space to write their stories of school. For the children, it was a place to ponder, to create, to expand their knowing, and to become

known to one another through talk, silence, and play. It was a place where Gale and the children discovered themselves and each other and learned to confront new situations, new puzzles, new learnings. It was a vulnerable place in the story of Gale's classroom but also a place of possibility and a place that continues to pull me into wonder.

Re-collected moment: Daily routines.

As Connelly and Clandinin (1990) note, humans are storytelling organisms. They suggest that in a classroom, the story that is told is mutually constructed, not only out of the lives of the students, but recognizably out of the daily practices of the teacher. The rhythm of life in the classroom can give us insight into teachers' personal practical knowledge as it is embodied and expressed in daily routines (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). Thinking about how routines might give me insight into Sadie's or Aaron's lives confused and mesmerized me. I wanted to inquire more into this wonder around routines.

I got to know Gale and the children, learned the rhythms of the classroom, by spending sustained time in their year one-two room. Each morning Gale would identify the day's activities for the children on an agenda she kept on the white board at the front of the room. Some of the daily routines were structured around the larger rhythm of the school day. Although there was no overt bell system, school began and recess and lunch commenced at the same times each day. The formal school day began with "O Canada" over the intercom system and other school information appeared on the in-school news network just prior to morning recess. Students came to know that they were to eat their morning snack during the televised news time. Gale would stop any activity that was occurring and with a gentle rise to her voice would tell the children to stop what they

were doing, retrieve their snacks from their backpacks, and get ready for the televised announcements. Gym and music were also timetabled for all students, allowing each class the same amount of time in the gym and music rooms.

Gale arrived at school long before her children, to ready the classroom for the day. As the children began to arrive in the classroom, they began to fall into the rhythm of the day. They knew to enter through a particular door, to place their shoes or boots on a particular rack in a particular boot room, enter their classroom and hang their coats and backpacks up on a particular hook at the back of the room. Some children would pull a library book out of their back pack and move to a pocket chart near the front of the room to retrieve their library card. At a gentle nod from Gale, they would move to the library to exchange their books. Others pulled out their home reading bags and deposited them in a particular bin at the back of the room, waiting for Gale or a helper parent of the day to read with them or assign a new book. I was not often present for these early morning routines, but when I was I observed that the children all seemed to know what to do. Each child's desk was identified with a laminated name card, the majority of their school supplies tucked away in their desks.

As the children entered the classroom, Gale would usually position herself by the classroom door saying good morning to the children as she took daily attendance and greeting any parents that arrived with their children. She would ask about a sibling, an after-school activity, or family news. The national anthem would start to play over the intercom and children would move quickly to their desks and sing along. They would then continue putting away their lunch kits, library books, and other supplies before finding a place around the classroom to participate in exploration time activities. Usually

these activities included Lego, listening/reading, puppet theatre, blocks and other small building materials, writing and drawing. Gale would often add other materials depending on student interest or what the current area of study was in the classroom.

Gale and I soon came to know that Shelby's routine included having her mother remain close at her side until the completion of "O Canada."

> "Shelby's here," a voice called out and I looked over at the door to see Shelby crying softly and clutching her mother. While Gale carried on with her conversation with the children I moved over to join Shelby and her mother in the hallway. "I slept through the alarm this morning," Shelby's mother shared, as Shelby tried to pull her into the classroom. Shelby's mother usually remains with her daughter during the singing of "O Canada" in the morning. But the anthem had already been played and it was obvious that Shelby's mother needed to leave and Shelby didn't want her to... Very reluctantly, Shelby let her mother go and she entered the classroom alone. "Love you," her mother gently called and Shelby ran back for one last hug. (Field note, January 27, 2003)

This field note shows the importance of routine in Shelby's life. She was used to having her mother bring her to school, walk her into the classroom, and stay through the singing of "O Canada." When they arrived at school late, after the singing of the anthem, Shelby was out of sorts. Her normal routine had been interrupted. Shelby did not want her mother to leave. It was only after her mother promised to return again at lunch time that Shelby reluctantly entered the classroom on her own.

Coming to school with her mother was part of Shelby's daily routine. It was also a routine shared by many of the children in the year one-two classroom. While some

arrived at school alongside their parents, many others came by bus. These were routines that were not shared by Aaron.

Aaron lived about four blocks from the school while he was attending Ravine. He walked to school on his own, he seldom brought snack, and he went home for lunch. He arrived at school, typically without a backpack, and often late. The first time he had been invited to take library books home, he forgot to return them. It was these books that his family was later billed for when they pulled him from the school.

Aaron had a different daily routine and a different daily rhythm that came out of the relationship he had with his family in transition. It seemed that school may have often served as a discord to the rhythm of his life. The many interruptions in Aaron's school routine were a source of constant tension for Gale and for Jeanette, the school principal.

But Aaron's life as a member of a family who lived on shifting landscapes was strongly intertwined with his life as a student. School was a place Aaron attended, a routine brought into his days, when it fit into the narrative coherence of his life. This way of storying school was his understanding of the rhythm and routine of school.

As I was pulled into Sadie's stories I also found things that confused me and mesmerized me around the narrative thread of daily routines. At Ravine, as in all schools, there is a rhythm around a child falling ill while at school. Sometimes a child might be asked to stay in at recess if it is too cold outside. Other times a child may rest awhile in the school infirmary. And, if a child is deemed too sick to be at school, a family member is called to come and take the child home. Something similar happened to Sadie that highlighted daily routines in her mother's life.

In early spring, Sadie was serving an in-school suspension in the office due to misbehaviours over the lunch time. The story of lunch time at Ravine required students to remain seated in their classrooms while having lunch. Sadie, along with her friend Seeta, had chosen to ignore this story over the course of several days and instead "wandered in and out of the classroom… ignored repeated requests from the lunch time supervisors to remain in her seat… [and used an inappropriately] loud voice… (Field note, March 6, 2003). As a result, both girls were required to spend subsequent recess time in the office.

The following day, as Sadie remained in the office during recess time, the school secretary noticed Sadie's cough and raspy voice. Sadie's mother was phoned and asked to pick up her sick daughter. Diane, Sadie's mother, worked on a factory floor not far from the school and was paid only for the hours she worked. She lived across town from Ravine and her work, and it would mean a substantial absence from work if Diane needed to take Sadie home and find a neighbour to care for her daughter. Diane asked instead if Sadie could remain at school until the end of the day. Colleen, the school secretary, said she had "to talk her into coming to take Sadie home" (Field note, March 6, 2003).

The routine of when a child falls ill at school was not a routine that fit easily into Diane's life. Although the school secretary was acting from a place of care when she stated that Sadie would be better off at home, she did not operate from a place of relational knowing (Hollingsworth, 1994). The school secretary did not recognize how difficult it would be for Sadie's mom to leave work and lose pay to take her daughter home.

Opening up Aaron's mother's and Sadie's mother's stories helped pull me into a liminal space (Heilbrun, 1999). It is in this space of liminality where we negotiate

moment to moment and open up the possibility of different stories of daily routine, of attendance, and of sick children at school.

Aaron's routine, his story to live by as a student at Ravine was shaped by his interrupted attendance. Aaron helped me begin to imagine what might otherwise be if the school story of attendance was more fluid, embracing the complexity and multiplicity of a student's life. Opening up a conversation with Aaron, his grandmother, his mother, and each other put us on uncertain ground and moved us to the liminal space where we began to explore other ways to understand Aaron's story to live by. Aaron helped me awaken to a knowing that there might be multiple stories of schools where regular attendance is not an important routine. Perhaps there might be a way to imagine school as a place that children can go when it fits in with the narrative coherence of their life. Perhaps it was the philosophy at Ravine, of un-graded, multi-aged classrooms with teachers and students staying together over multiple years which allowed a space to be maintained for Aaron in the school. Maybe it was this philosophy that helped Gale imagine a way to sustain Aaron's place as she kept his nametag and his desk in her year one-two room. Perhaps it was this story of school of a fluid, shifting place that held Gale and Jeanette back from calling the truancy officer and that allowed Shelby to call forward her story of Aaron in the rediscovery of the brown crayon that he had once given her.

As I attend again to Aaron's story I can see that Aaron's routine, his story to live by, his narrative coherence, was not interrupted by a story of school that attends to regular attendance or overdue library books. His story of routine is understood in the context of his life outside of school.

As I attend again to Sadie's story of being sick at school and of having her mother called to take her home, I see also how the story of school does not always easily fit into the story of life. In the dominant story of school, calling a parent when a child is ill is seen as caring for the student. Like Aaron, Sadie's story to live by is understood only in relation to the life she lives alongside her mother. In the story of Sadie's life at school it is her mother that helps shape her experiences. Sadie's sense of self, her sense of community, is in narrative process, emerging through the stories she lives alongside her mother and alongside her school. Looking at the narrative thread of routines makes me attend to a possibility of separate storylines for Sadie's mother and the school. Sadie's life in school is intertwined with her life and her mother's life outside of school. Perhaps for Sadie, as for her mother, being ill at school did not have the same meaning as it did for the school secretary. Perhaps opening up a conversation with Sadie's mother might have allowed the school secretary to explore other ways of caring for Sadie, and in turn, for her mother. Doing so might also open up the possibility of recognizing how we often move too easily toward privileging the story of school over the story of a family's life.

Both Aaron's and Sadie's stories open up possibilities for other children, families, teachers, administrators, and researchers to continue our stories to live by, in relational and unbounded ways, on school landscapes. It is the stories of lives in relationship and in context that pull me into wonders around routines in schools.

Re-collected moment: Exploring an ethic of care.

Gale's interest in care theory (Noddings, 1984, 1992, 2002) emerged from questions that started to surface for her in her teaching around the area of character

education, a topic that was gaining popularity in her school district. A formal, mandated character education program was not the way Gale imagined herself living with her children in her classroom. Instead of seeing character education as a program imposed on teachers and students, Gale was interested in understanding it as a way of "being in relationship with her students" (Transcript of conversation, January 9, 2003). She wanted to practice moral education as a way of living in caring relation with her students.

Shortly after Christmas, Gale shared with me some of her understanding around caring and moral education as it related to Aaron's continued absence from school.

> Gale talked about her understanding of caring as an action that involves a "care-er" and a "cared for." In her understanding of care she stories Aaron as someone who does not allow a space for her to act as a caring teacher. "He doesn't leave a space for me to care for him," she told me. "I wonder if maybe he has a different story of caring," I responded. Gale went on to ask me about the possible implications of not telling the "authorities" that Aaron was not attending school. I ended up asking questions of my own: What might caring look like in this situation? Would it be caring to "turn him in" to the truancy officer knowing that his mother was trying to find a way to return to Blue River? As we wondered about a possible story of home schooling for Aaron, Gale told me that she had once home schooled her own boys during a year of family travel. "I took this responsibility very seriously," she told me. (Field note, January 28, 2003)

In her teaching, Gale intentionally tried to create conditions that gave children a voice in their learning. From greeting them at the door and providing exploration time early in the morning for children to reconnect, to selecting classroom themes based on

student interest, Gale worked hard to listen to and to understand her year one-two students. Her final capping exercise for her master's project was a partial self-study around creating caring conditions in the classroom, yet Gale struggled over what it meant to care for Aaron, a student she felt didn't "leave a space" for this caring. She wondered about her responsibility to alert the school board authorities over Aaron's lack of attendance. Noddings (2002) integrates these threads of justice and care as she distinguishes between "caring for" and "caring about" (p. 86). While "caring for" involves natural caring and grows out of relationship, "'caring about' can deteriorate to political self-righteousness and to forms of intervention that do more harm than good" (p. 86). While Gale felt conflicted around Aaron's story of school attendance, she appeared to embrace an understanding of "caring for" as the truancy officer was never called. Instead, she worked to keep a space for Aaron in her classroom and in the memory of his classmates by maintaining his desk and his nametag in her room. As Gale continued to understand more of Aaron's life through watching him in school, talking with his grandmother, and engaging in sustained conversation with me around her ongoing tensions, Gale tried to live a story of care that integrated her understanding of caring for and caring about. Perhaps calling forward and setting aside the school story around attendance and truancy officers helped her attend to the integration of "caring about" and "caring for." Instead of fitting Aaron's story into the school story of truancy, Gale chose to lay the stories alongside one another and make a decision based on her relationship with Aaron and her knowing of his life outside of school. Perhaps, however, the truancy officer might have been called had Aaron not been a participant in my research and Gale had not heard these ongoing stories of Aaron's life outside of school alongside his family.

As Gale continued to struggle over the tensions she experienced around Aaron's attendance, she began to pull forward some of her own parent stories around school absence. "My boys had a great year with me when they weren't officially in school," she told me (Field note, January 28, 2003) as she related her family's experience around home schooling and travelling. Revisiting her own family stories around school absence seemed to allow Gale to stay with the tension around Aaron's story. Perhaps this allowed her to open up a space where she understood a story of care in the relationship Aaron experienced with his family, a place that Noddings (1984) tells us is central to developing an understanding of care. Perhaps it was this understanding that allowed her to maintain a space for Aaron's story in her classroom. Perhaps staying with this tension may continue to keep this space open, a space that Aaron and his family may continue to return to.

Attending to Sadie's stories of experience at Ravine also helped me identify other moments of tension around understanding care in a relational way. These moments centred around food and clothing and show how Sadie's and her mother's story of care bumped up against school and teacher stories around care.

> Sadie told me today that her mom doesn't like the school giving her food at lunch time. I'm not sure if she forgot her lunch yesterday or had just eaten it all at recess but Gale helped her get something else to eat from one of the lunch supervisors. (Field note, October 24, 2002)

> Gale moved to her desk and reached down into a bag of second-hand clothing she had been keeping aside for Sadie. She pulled out a pair of snowpants several sizes larger than Sadie's pink ones. She told Sadie they were hers to keep… At the end

of the day Sadie wore her too-small pink snowpants home, the second-hand ones from her teacher left behind in her cubby. (Interim field text, based on field note, November 13, 2002)

In attending to these moments I began to see how Gale's story to live by was nested within her story of care. Her story to live by was threaded within the plotline of offering food to a hungry student and providing warm clothing that fit to someone who did not have anything appropriate to wear outside on a cold day. Yet I wonder, as Gale tried to be subtle in handing out this clothing to Sadie, if she also felt somewhat conflicted in this story of giving. Perhaps she understood that this act of charity might also be experienced as an act of shaming. I wonder what sense Gale made of the snowpants being left behind in the cubby. In Sadie's action of leaving the snowpants at school, I began to see how her story of care was nested within the story she lived as daughter. Inquiring into these moments offers possibilities for understanding care in a relational way.

In the moment when Sadie left her second-hand snowpants in her cubby and wore her too-small snowpants home, I saw how Sadie was awake to her mother's presence in her story of school. By leaving her snowpants behind in her cubby, perhaps Sadie was trying to also help Gale and me awaken to this story she was living.

In the moment around the lack of food at lunch time, I see how we were not yet mindful of Sadie's stories to live by. Aware of Sadie being hungry at lunch time, Gale worked to find Sadie something to eat. This was a story that Sadie appeared to take home with her as she told me on the following day that her mom "doesn't like the school giving

her food" (Field note, October 24, 2002). Gale learns from this moment as we see her help Sadie negotiate another lunch time moment in a new way.

> Sadie had not brought a lunch today, and although I offered to share mine with her, Gale thought Sadie's mother might be upset by this… Gale took Sadie down to her brother's room to see if he had remembered his lunch. A few minutes later Tyler showed up in our room, with a heated bowl of Chef Boyardee and shared this with Sadie… He stayed beside her during lunch and also shared some chips and a candy that he had pulled out from his pocket. (Field note, June 5, 2003)

Gale's action of taking Sadie to see her older brother showed how Gale understood caring in multiple ways. She saw Sadie as a child who was hungry, having forgotten to bring a lunch from home. She knew Sadie's mom did not experience food being given to her daughter at school as an act of care. Perhaps Sadie's mother felt the school was storying her as an unfit, uncaring mother. By taking Sadie to see her older brother to help solve this problem, Gale showed how she was being responsive not only to Sadie's hunger but also how she was beginning to attend to Sadie's mother's story of care. Acting in this way kept Gale awake to Sadie's mother's place in Sadie's story of school.

As Gale came to know both Aaron and Sadie over the course of the school year, she came to understand more about their lives off the school landscape. By choosing not to call the truancy officer for Aaron and by taking Sadie to her brother to get something to eat, she honoured the place of the home in her stories of her students' school and classroom lives. As she talked with me about her tensions in these moments, I began to see how her own stories to live by around care were interrupted and shifted. Her stories

of caring began to intermingle with her students' families' stories of caring. Inquiring into Aaron's story of absence took Gale back to her own stories of home schooling her sons and helped her see the place of family in a school story of care. Taking time to listen to Sadie tell of how her mother didn't want the school giving her food at lunch time showed how Gale attended to what care meant both on and off the school landscape in Sadie's life.

Living alongside Gale and Sadie at Ravine and Aaron both on and off the landscape, and re-collecting these moments, helped me realize a story of relational knowing (Gallego *et al.*, 2001; Hollingsworth, 1994). This way of knowing is grounded in the belief that education comes out of personal experience (Dewey, 1938). It was the relationships between and amongst us all that allowed us to learn about ourselves as we learned from each other. It was this way of knowing in relation to one another that opened up possibilities for understanding care and for experiencing a liminal space of community. By attending to how Gale was trying to live out an ethic of care in her classroom, I began to see also how community, like care, is understood only in a relational way. It was meeting Aaron and Sadie as individuals that allowed Gale and I to attend to them, and each other, from the wholeness of our lives, and that opened up a between space for being in relation, a space of community. In these re-collected moments around attending to an ethic of care in the classroom that confused me and mesmerized me, I found myself pulled into a story of community that was responsive and relational and composed and lived out over time.

There are so many other possible moments to re-collect from my time at Ravine Elementary School. As a narrative inquirer, re-collecting moments, moments where something unusual was taking place… happenings that confused me and mesmerized me… is part of what I do, part of who I am. The moments I have recollected, the narratives of experience I have written about, like the stories in Max's paintings, still have some secrets to keep—even from me.

As *The Collector of Moments* (Buchholz & Neumeyer, 1999) comes to a close, winter passes and then, on a warm spring day, a package arrives from Max. Inside the package is a painting that captured images from Max's stay on the island. The painting is of a boy in a blue anorak standing on a red easy chair and playing the violin. "On the back of the picture is pasted a torn-out piece of sketching paper. And there, in Max's large, familiar pencil writing, are the words: 'You know something, Professor—your music is always there in my pictures.'"

Just as the young boy left his mark on the professor's paintings, Aaron and Sadie have left their marks on my life. It was our lives in relation that danced before me as I re-collected these moments and wrote these words. It was their bodies that walked alongside me in the metaphorical woods of my research. I still feel their presence, sense the tensions, glimpse the possibilities behind the re-collected moments of our experiences. As I think about my research puzzle, around how to share my wonder around a narrative understanding of community with others, I call forward memories of Sadie and Aaron. I can smell Sadie's unwashed hair, feel her cracked fingernails as she reaches for my hand, see her second-hand snowpants tucked away in her classroom cubby as she heads for

home. I sense her standing beside me spooning a little more chicken soup with rice into Shane's bowl. I hear Aaron's words of "in a dark, dark, wood" calling softly out to a friend in the classroom, see his aunt sitting beside him at his desk on his first day back at school after a long absence, feel his body curl up to mine as I visit him in his home. "Write it down" are words that still ring in my ears. It is these children, their lived experiences in relation to my own, that stay with me as I continue to wander the landscape of schools, encountering new people, attending to new stories, imagining new ways of being in relationship.

Chapter 8

Overlapping lives: New paths in the woods

"So what was your dissertation research all about?" I was asked again recently. I was attending a meeting in my role as coordinator of a new community-based research group, part of the Department of Paediatrics at the University of Alberta but situated within the community. Our meeting was about a new research project[8], a project that was finding me walk alongside a new community as we were imagining visually inquiring into the identity stories of children in an indigenous charter school.

In my response I found myself returning to the metaphorical woods of my research at Ravine. I told of the path that led me into situating my work at the school in Gale's year one-two classroom. I told of becoming lost in the stories I lived alongside Sadie and Aaron. I found that as I spoke, my stories meandered, my path continued to shift. As I told stories of my life in relation with Gale, Sadie, and Aaron, I felt their spirits moving alongside me as I navigated my telling of my time in the woods. It was these relationships that have been "the spirit that carrie[d] me from day to day" (Sewall, 1996).

In recollecting those moments with Sadie and Aaron, I also found other moments, other relationships, that were being carried forward—moments of Gary and his mother from my first year of teaching; moments of struggling to maintain placements in the school for the young boys who lived outside my school district's borders; moments of being positioned as a parent on the school landscape in relation to my own children's school experiences; moments, moments, moments. I realized also that these re-collected

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[8] This research project, "A Visual Narrative Look at Mother Earth's Children's Charter School: A Pilot Project," is being funded by a Caritas Health Group Research Grant.

moments, these storied lives, will always be with me as I continue to walk new paths, learning along the way (Bateson, 1994).

Staying with Wonder

When I return to my field notes, my time in Gale's year one-two classroom, I see how I was in a space of wonder, of uncertainty, of unfolding relationships. My research notebooks and the pages in this dissertation are filled with moments of walking alongside Sadie and Aaron, wondering about who they were and who we were together, wondering about their lives with their classmates and their families, wondering about what sense they were making of their experiences in school, wondering about what sense I was making of my time alongside them in the metaphorical woods of my research. I lingered over these wonders, these resting spaces in the woods, until I started to experience the places of bumping up, as Sadie's stories of who she was and was becoming began to shift and as Aaron began to spend more and more time alongside his family, off the school landscape. Walking alongside Sadie and Aaron awakened me to the complexity of attending narratively to an understanding of community in schools. I began to realize that I could not understand community in schools as a place or as an abstract notion. I could only understand it in the context of Aaron's life, Aaron's experience of community, Sadie's life, Sadie's experience of community, and my life, my experience of community.

Trying to stay with the complexity around my time in the metaphorical woods of my research was difficult work. It was in the bumping up places between stories of school and dominant stories of community with Sadie's and Aaron's stories to live by that I was able to learn about the experience of community in their lives. It was trying to

inquire deeply into these moments of tension that, perhaps, helped me begin to understand. By staying with the plotline of relationships I began to see community as a meeting place of people's lives.

A Community of Choice

I began this dissertation by telling my experience of coming to the Centre table on the 6th floor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta and understanding it as a space of community, of relational knowing (Hollingsworth, 1994). It was by attending to my experience in the between spaces of conversation at the table that I began to unpack my emerging research puzzle. For me, and for others who gather at the table, the Centre is experienced as a community of choice (Lindemann Nelson, 1995), a space to join with other people who share a passion for composing our lives as narrative inquirers. Writing about my experience at the Centre became one way for me to discover and shape my own telling of what it meant to have an experience in a community. As I attended to that, I began to think about how to make a space for relational knowing with my research participants at Ravine.

I am reminded of Lindemann Nelson's (1995) work on found and chosen communities. Lindemann Nelson writes that "the community of choice functions as a moral space in which its members can examine what they do in the wider community" (p. 27). It was this community of choice I experienced during my time at the Centre that travelled with me during my time at Ravine. Relationships begun at the Centre table were carried forward into my research. Situating my work in a larger study coordinated by Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly, and alongside two other doctoral students from the

Centre table, Shaun Murphy and Anne Murray Orr, was a decision I made based on how I imagined living out my research, my life as a narrative inquirer "in the wider community," in a relational way.

Like my time at the Centre, I experienced my research relationships as a community of choice offering a space where the "morally self-defining stories" (Lindemann Nelson, 1995, p. 24) of a person's life are uncovered. It was the morally self-defining stories of Sadie, of Aaron, of Gale, and of me that were uncovered as we walked alongside each other during my research year and beyond. "Because it is a community that creates moral space in which narratives can be told, it has the resources to put faces on people, and so to deal with difference in a manner that is attentive to individuals" (Lindemann Nelson, p. 30). It was by understanding community in a storied, relational way, in the context of lives, that I was able to be attentive to who we all were and were becoming. Lindemann Nelson believes that "[o]ur communities do more than guide us, they constitute us" (p. 28). In understanding my research as a place of relationship I experienced community in the meeting places of our lives.

Pulled into Stories

In the spaces around the Centre table I began to re-collect other moments of my experience in community. In these moments I located myself in a multiplicity of ways—as a student, a teacher, a counsellor, a teacher-educator, a daughter, a sister, and a parent. In my first chapter I tell a silent story of being my father's daughter—a recollected moment that helped me think of the myriad of ways that I live my life and that other people live their lives. I wrote around an untold story—a recollected moment of being in

relationship with a student-teacher in an undergraduate course I was instructing. It reminds me of the images that are just outside the pictures in *The Collector of Moments* (Buchholz & Neumeyer, 1999)—images that are important to helping understand one reading of the finished painting. I also shared storied moments that located me as a teacher and a counsellor that helped me think about the borderlands of schools and how people are often positioned on the other side of the borders. It was the curious things in these storied moments that pulled me in—that made me want to inquire further into children's experience of community on a school landscape.

It was the narrative beginnings shared in my first chapter that, like Max's paintings in *The Collector of Moments*, were "happenings that confused me and mesmerized me" and helped me imagine my research. I wrote also how I embraced Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) understanding of a research puzzle. I told how my two young children, Liam and Joanna, engaged with a puzzle in very different ways resulting in very different pictures. My children helped me see how there is always more to discover in puzzles, in paintings, in re-collected moments.

As I attend again to why *The Collector of Moments* has resonated within me so strongly I see how it is narrative inquiry that helps me see what lies beyond a painting, a storied moment. Max painted his pictures as a way of making sense of what he saw, felt, understood, and knew. For me it was by attending to my wonders and the storied lives of my research participants, and re-collecting the moments of experience, that I was able to make sense of what I saw, felt, understood, and know—in relation to and with others.

The Collector of Moments, like narrative inquiry, paints life as it is while at the same time suggesting that there is more than what seems to be so—there is a multiplicity

of understandings. Just as Max encouraged the young boy to discover the stories attached to the pictures, narrative inquiry encourages the reader to discover his or her own personal practical knowledge (Clandinin, 1985) in connection with the lived and shared stories. The paintings in *The Collector of Moments* are most interesting for what they don't show and invite me to pay attention to how to attend to things beyond the frame of the paintings—mysterious possibilities I can't see but must imagine for myself. The moments collected in these paintings included the past, present, and future. They were never complete stories, always beginning and ending in the midst. It was the curious things in the paintings that pulled me in—that made me want to know more about the storied lives behind the collected moments.

Etc.

It was the stories I heard and lived alongside my research participants that guided me on my writing path. But I am no longer in the woods of my research, and I wonder now about new paths I am beginning to walk. What do I carry with me from that time in the woods into new conversations I am having, new moments I am experiencing, new relationships that are forming?

In writing this last chapter I return again to my first chapter and the moment when I was asked by a professor to consider words related to community, a moment which led to my imagined scribbling of a #4 in the margins of my dictionary. At first, I wanted to be able to re-look at those early thoughts and be able to say something more certain about how I had come to understand community through my research. I felt I ought to be able to do this in the final pages of my dissertation. Instead, I find myself remaining in the

liminal space, a space speaking of uncertainty, of fluidity, of a multiplicity of understanding, a space understood only in the moment-to-moment, unfolding experiences of relationship.

The margin in my dictionary does not leave enough room for these stories of experience. I want to write the word etc. in the margin, in order to leave a space for continued wandering around my thoughts, my knowing. My understanding of community cannot be separated from the experience of a person's life. In this experience of community, in the living of lives, my understanding will always be unbounded. I do not come to an understanding of community until I understand each person's experience, and even that is not a fixed experience. The work of Bach (1998), referencing LeDoeuff (1991), invites me to be comfortable with this fluid understanding. She encourages me to let my thinking wander and to reread my life stories in ways that keep my research puzzle open. And so I turn to new stories of being in relationship in my life now as a counsellor, a researcher, and a parent; of experiences where I am struggling to stay in the liminal space of community and where memories of Sadie and Aaron carry me forward through new paths in the woods.

Living Differently in the World

I have a responsibility now, because of the stories I carry forward, to live differently in the world. I am living and telling new stories of who I am, of who I am continually becoming. I tell them here now to help me think about new possibilities for experiencing community, for being in relation.

Remaining in the liminal space in the woods...as counsellor.

After my research year at Ravine, having completed my doctoral course work, I chose to return part-time to my work as a school counsellor. As a single mom I needed security in my life and a stable income. I also missed the energy of being in a school, working alongside teachers, students, and families. I wanted to continue to think of community and relational knowing within my own day-to-day practice.

It was a story of relationship that has pulled me into my current school. My principal, Kevin, and I had been colleagues in a previous school. We had shared many conversations around the table in my counselling office and around the clusters of desks in his classroom. The sharing of our stories created openings where we became able to imagine possibilities for who we wanted to be in the lives of students, families, and colleagues. It was with these conversations in our memories that we began to explore working together again. Mindful of my intention to continue imagining shaping spaces for dialogue with parents and children, Kevin created a part-time counselling position for me at his school. His only formal request was that I facilitate the needs of special education students at the school.

These past two years I have found myself trying to remain attentive to what Sadie, Aaron, and Gale were helping me imagine as we walked together during my research journey. They awakened me to how I had, in the past, at times, as counsellor and teacher, kept some distance from my students and their families, how I had, at times, failed to stop and linger. By learning to become present to their experiences I was drawn into a relational space, a place of border crossing (Anzaldúa, 1987)—moving me to continue to struggle to try to remain in a state of wide-awakeness.

I still share in many conversations with teachers, students, and families around tables in classrooms and in my new counselling office, but now I also find myself sharing in many conversations around kitchen tables in family homes. These conversations are ones where I also share stories of my own life in response to stories that are shared with me. When my phone rings at home now, it may be a family member of a child from my school. It has not been an easy decision to give out my home phone number. Doing so also means involving my own children in my life as counsellor, but I can no longer imagine saving those conversations for my official hours at school. Who I am at school is a part of who I am at home. Who I am at home is a part of who I am at school.

Now, instead of looking at assessment as the only way to access assistance for a child experiencing difficulty at school, I spend time with the child's family, listening first to what matters to them, trying to silence what I think might be best. This might mean helping find a new home, accessing swimming lessons for children, or going to gather groceries from the food bank. It might mean finding a volunteer study buddy or a group that focuses on teaching social skills. It might involve a game of Twister, playing alongside a child in a sand tray, or having a conversation with the help of hand puppets. I try hard to live within an ethic of care as I live out these stories alongside children and families. Sometimes it takes one or two conversations to find a meeting place for our stories, but usually it takes several more for these relational spaces to develop. Often I find one child, or one parent, who has already started to negotiate this relational space with me invite another child, or another parent, to also imagine opening up such a space. Sometimes the conversations are filled with tears or even with cries of anger. Sometimes

a door is slammed shut. Other times it is only gently propped open and I struggle to be patient and to linger.

I am also trying to attend to the stories that are shared with me with loving perception (Lugones, 1987) and to give back stories in return. Choosing to live my life as counsellor in this way means choosing to continually find new paths in the woods in response to who I am walking alongside. Choosing to live in the middle space in the woods, this space of relationship, continues to draw forward moments of tension, of uncertainty, of possibility. At times, though, I worry I am not meeting the academic needs of the "special education" students in my school. I understand that when children struggle in school, testing may be a way to provide insight into these struggles. I understand also how testing may provide access to additional support, but what I now understand most is the importance of relational, storytelling spaces in opening up places of new possibility. This is what moves me forward as I linger in conversation with colleagues, with children, with families. Trying to be attentive to all of these multiple conversations, these multiple stories of experience, helps me see the complexity around what it means to help students who struggle in school. There is no one single story of what it means to struggle, or of what it means to be in relationship, within these multiple experiences. As I work with students and teachers and families to open up middle spaces of connection, I wonder if what I am trying to do is shape communities of choice (Lindemann Nelson, 1995) where we can come together to see and be seen, to share our unfolding stories.

I know that I experience my time in my school differently as a result of my time with Sadie and Aaron and Gale. What I learned alongside them is to stay with the

complexity of the lived story and to look for answers in the unfolding nature of the relationships.

... as researcher.

I experienced uncertainty over my decision to return to working in a school after my research year. I had witnessed Gale struggle with what it meant to live differently in her classroom after taking the time to inquire into her practice during her own graduate work. I worried about how I would handle those same struggles. At the same time I was planning my return to my home school district, I was invited to participate in the unfolding of a new community-based research group. This new group was forming at the Misericordia Community Hospital as part of the Department of Paediatrics at the University of Alberta. I had never imagined finding a place for myself in the Faculty of Medicine. My homeplace (hooks, 1990) was in schools or in faculties of education, but when I first met Lola Baydala, a paediatrician and the research director at the Misericordia Hospital, her stories around health, learning, and Aboriginal communities confused me and mesmerized me. The thought of maintaining a research identity along with the opportunity of working on a research team that imagined community at the centre of its work captured my imagination. I was pulled into this work.

During my first year in this new position, I found myself walking alongside researchers from a multitude of areas; medicine, nursing, psychology, education, and human ecology. I also found myself again on the landscape of schools. The Mother Earth's Children's Charter School (MECCS) had recently opened and I was charged with the coordination of the research efforts around evaluating how culturally compatible

education affected students' academic achievement, mental health, physical health, health habits, and school attendance. This research project[9], initially designed as "research on" a school using a quantitative approach to evaluation soon made room for a "research with," narrative, storied way of understanding experience. I introduced Lola, the principal investigator of the project, to Jean, my dissertation supervisor, and soon Lola was studying what it meant to live a responsive research relationship as a narrative inquirer at MECCS. Our research group continued to expand as we were joined by other researchers and people from MECCS who were interested in this collaborative, storied approach to a school evaluation.

Entering into a mutually responsive research relationship with MECCS has expanded the role of the research team in profound ways. We find ourselves part of the landscape, part of the daily life of the school.

Although this research project is currently in its second year of a three-year study, a new puzzle has also emerged. Martha Letendre, a MECCS parent and elder, had been talking with me about her own wonders around identity and how she was gathering photographs to tell a story of change in her own community. Her wonders confused me and mesmerized me. I began to wonder alongside Martha and others at MECCS, what the students might tell us visually (Bach, 1998) about what mattered to them around their school experiences. As Martha and I talked I experienced a between space, a space that was pulling me backward into stories I had lived alongside Sadie and Aaron, a space that was pulling me inward into who I was and was becoming in relation with others, and a space that was pulling me forward into stories that opened up new possibilities for

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[9] "Evaluating Success: Mother Earth's Children's Charter School Longitudinal Study" is supported by the Canadian Institute of Health Research.

thinking about and living an experience of community. I think back on my early conversation with my friend and research colleague, Shaun Murphy, who told me how I spoke of community as a verb. "Yes," I want to tell him. That is exactly how I understand the term. I have to understand it as a verb because the experience of community is as a living of community.

As I brought a gift of tobacco to an elder during a recent meeting to ask for wisdom to guide our research path at MECCS, my thoughts turned again to Sadie and Aaron. It was these two children and their teacher Gale who guided me through the woods of my research at Ravine. It is these stories of relationship and relational knowing that continue to walk alongside me as I make new paths in the woods.

... as parent.

Who I am as a counsellor and researcher is profoundly affected by the life I live as parent. My two children attend the neighbourhood school a few blocks away from our home. There is a ravine across from our house which, when my father was alive, led directly to his home. It was the main reason we moved into our home shortly after my mother's death. When my father died I found our home had lost some of its meaning for me. I had lost my sense of place, my connection to this small city. The ravine was no longer a place that led to my father's house. It was a place I avoided—until recently. After my father died, I decided to make plans to return to the neighbouring larger city, a city where I lived with my children when they were first born, a city where I continue to spend a great deal of my time. However, this decision was put off as I worked to

complete my doctoral degree. "When Mommy is done her dissertation" was the response my children gave to questions around our moving.

Now "Mommy" is nearing the end of her dissertation and talks have surfaced once more about a move into the neighbouring city, but something unusual has happened, something that has confused and mesmerized me. My children and I have returned to walking in the nearby ravine. We notice the path that once led to my father's house. But now, instead of following that singular path, we spend our time discovering new ones and in this discovery, we have found new stories that have pulled us into the decision to stay in our community. The stories are found in the people who sometimes join us on our walks, the places we stop to linger, or the new places we walk towards. They are stories of relationship. They are stories that have pulled us in.

The Overlapping of Lives

Moving through life, I walk in the company of others. Who I am is not understood separately in my role as counsellor, researcher, or parent, nor is it understood separately from who I am and who I am becoming in relation with others. I am a story in process (Huber & Whelan, 2000). Bateson (1989) writes that our lives should be looked at as compositions. She reminds me that no one, no life, is completely knowable. I am known as a teacher, a counsellor, a researcher. I am also known as a mother, a sister, a friend. I am known, yet not completely known. It is all of me I carry into the experience of community, which is always my experience of being in relationship. "Learning, I become someone new…Growing, [I] move through worlds of difference, the cycles and circles of life, fulfilled by overlapping with the lives of others" (Bateson, 2000, p. 18).

Recently I returned to Gale's classroom at Ravine. I have known Gale as a teacher, a research participant, and a friend. I witnessed her with a new group of students and saw much that still remains unknown.

Gale invited me into her classroom after we had spent time together in conversation around my research text. After a full school year as an observant participant (Florio-Ruane, 2001) in her classroom, and another two years writing about my time alongside Gale, Sadie, and Aaron, I thought I was coming to a form of closure around this work. Gale helped me see that my work, our relationship, remains open.

In Gale's response to my written words she reminded me that "the reader encounters not just a text, but a real person within the lived story of the narrative inquiry" (Schulz, 1997, p. 138). Gale is a real person situated within my inquiry. In taking back my words to her I knew I cared deeply about her response.

I met with Gale over lunch to share this text with her. She was eager to read my writing and I was eager for her response. When a few weeks passed with no word from Gale, I began to worry. I knew that she would linger over my words and would be drawn back to the moments with Sadie and Aaron. I knew that I had pulled forward moments of tension, moments that may be hard for her to revisit. But I hoped that she would see in my words the care that I saw in her teaching, the fidelity I felt to our relationship (Noddings, 1987). Finally she called and she invited me to her home for lunch. I was reminded of the glass of iced tea we had shared at her home when we first discussed my research.

We met again in her kitchen, this time over several cups of coffee. Gale began by circling the word "tension" found in my table of contents. But instead of returning to the

tensions written in my text, she turned instead to a new tension she was experiencing. Gale opened our conversation by sharing with me a story of being in relation with a young girl in her current classroom, and I saw how she was pulling forward moments with Sadie and Aaron in helping her attend to this new difficult story she was living. In choosing to linger over the places of tension in my text, Gale shared how she, too, wanted to learn from our work together. Like me, she wanted to continue to live a wide-awake life. Gale's wonders drew me into this new experience she was living in her classroom as she called upon me to help her imagine a different way of responding to her young student's lived story. It was the living of our relationship in my research year that led to this telling of my time in her classroom. I see also how the retelling is ongoing in new stories we are living and choosing to share. It is this living and sharing of stories that invites community.

Gale brought an ethic of care to her reading of my text. It is part of who she is, who she is becoming. It is part of our relationship. When Gale began to tell me of new wonders she was attending to around creating caring places for children in her classroom and school, she wondered how I might also remain part of this unfolding story. I do not know, but it is our relationship that will continue to carry us forward into new research possibilities.

During my time in Gale's classroom I witnessed her new focus on inquiry-based learning. She told me how she believed that "genuine inquiry is based in authentic conversations" (Field note, May 12, 2005) and how she wanted to attend to mindful learning in her classroom. I participated in a friendship circle where one child's imagination was captured by the similarity between dear (from the morning message) and

deer (which she recalled seeing on her way to school). This led to wonders about "spots on baby deer's backs… and why do they need to camouflage?" (Field note, May 12, 2005). As children were invited to share their own stories about deer sightings and deer knowledge, a few young girls began to imagine starting their own inquiry on the subject of deer. "By offering my students time to wonder, ask questions, share stories, and make their own choices they have become more curious," Gale told me (Field note, May 12, 2005). I was confused and mesmerized by this friendship circle and found myself thinking about how a community of choice was forming in this activity.

As I left Gale's classroom, one of the young girls interested in inquiring more into the subject of deer rushed to give me a hug. I bent down and caught a smell of sunshine and grass in her recently washed hair. It brought forward memories of Sadie and as I walked down the hallway to the front doors of the school I realized that one day the smell of Sadie's hair may no longer be with me. One day I may also no longer remember the feel of Aaron's warm body curled up next to mine. But I do know that these memories will forever shape who I am and am becoming as I make way for new smells, new hugs, new experiences of being in relation, in community.

Lessons from Badger

The book *Crow and Weasel* (Lopez & Pohrt, 1991) helps me think about the stories I encountered in my journey through the woods of my research. It helps me also think about new paths I am on. The book tells of two travellers who also set out on a journey, and how they encounter many wonders, eventually find wisdom, and return

home to recount their stories. Lopez helps me attend to the importance of telling our stories as a way of caring for one another.

> "Now Crow," said Weasel, taking his seat, "tell Badger of our people and of our village. Tell her about this journey of ours."
>
> Crow took his place in front of the other two. He also felt awkward, but with the help of Badger, a few pointed questions to sharpen his delivery, he began to speak strongly with deliberation and care, about all that Weasel had asked him to say.
>
> "You are fine young men," said Badger when Crow had finished. "I can see that. But you are beginning to sense your responsibilities, too, and the journey you have chosen is a hard one. If you keep going, one day you will be men. You will have families."
>
> "We are very grateful for your hospitality, Badger," said Crow. "Each place we go, we learn something, and your wisdom here has helped us."
>
> "I would ask you to remember only this one thing," said Badger. "The stories people tell have a way of taking care of them. If stories come to you, care for them. And learn to give them away where they are needed. Sometimes a person needs a story more than food to stay alive. That is why we put these stories in each other's memory. This is how people care for themselves. One day you will be good story tellers. Never forget these obligations." (p. 60)

My research echoes the words written by Barry Lopez and spoken by Badger. It was only by living an ethic of care (Noddings, 1984) with my research participants that I was able to see, hear, understand, and know some of their lived stories. It was also by

taking back my knowing of their stories to my participants that allowed me to make meaning of the experiences, and to keep this meaning fluid. Sharing these stories with my supervisor and my research colleagues also helped me attend to the places of tension in the stories which, in turn, opened up a space for wondering, for wandering, for imagining how things might be otherwise, and for staying in a liminal space of uncertainty. It was the stories lived and shared that allowed us all to care for one another. It was the path of relationship I chose for my research. It is the path of relationship I choose for my life.

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